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ABSTRACT

One of the mandates of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 is that students develop a writing portfolio. Ultimately, schools must elevate the average performance level of students' portfolios to the benchmark of "proficient." During site visits to 29 schools, 34 indicators were identified that differentiated writing scores and programs in continuously improving schools from those in continuously declining schools. A self-study needs assessment instrument--the School Study of Writing Instruction--was developed for schools to assess their needs relative to the indicators. The instrument has four operational stages: conducting interviews with teachers, students, and administrators; writing a report framed around the 34 indicators; using the report in a faculty-wide session to rate the school on the indicators; and using the ratings to set priorities and plan actions for improvement of the writing program. This report describes the pilot testing of the instrument in one small Kentucky elementary school and the testing of parts of it by a few other entities. The pilot test assessed the value of the self-study for schools, the level of external facilitator assistance needed by schools, and the validity and reliability of the instrument. The self-study was successful for the pilot-test school, which was attributed to a faculty sense of ownership and to the school's customizing of the instrument. The whole process was completed in 5 weeks. Facilitator assistance was critical but was not needed constantly. Revisions are proposed to minimize threats to the instrument's validity and reliability. Appendices include parts of the instrument and evaluation materials. (Contains 21 references.) (SV)

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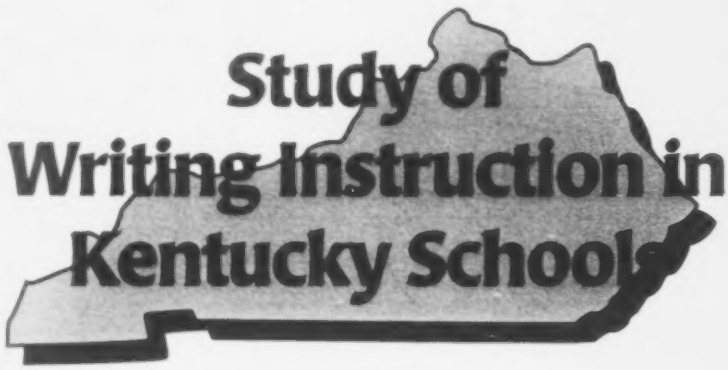


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# Pilot Test of the *School Study of Writing Instruction:* A Self-Study Needs Assessment Instrument

A Product of the Kentucky State Project:
Designing Professional Development for Portfolio Improvement

A Collaboration between AEL, Inc. and the Kentucky Department of Education

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the mandates of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 is that students develop a writing portfolio (Kentucky Department of Education, 1990, 1998). Ultimately, schools in Kentucky are expected to elevate the average of students' portfolios to the benchmark of *proficient*. To aid in this endeavor, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL), Inc. began a collaborative project in 1996 (AEL, 1997a). The original goal of the project was to design new professional development programs for teachers in the area of writing instruction.

The project proposal included a preliminary telephone survey to assess teachers' professional development needs prior to designing new programs (AEL, 1995). However, at the first meeting between KDE and AEL, key decision makers realized that a more in-depth scope for background research was in order. They decided against the telephone survey, which would only be useful for gaining superficial insights, in favor of a series of site visits that would more systematically ascertain teachers' needs. More specifically, the observations made during site visits would establish indicators of quality writing programs and thereby determine needs of less successful schools by their apparent lack of these indicators. At the second meeting, a collaborative research team composed of KDE and AEL staff was formed. Through site visits to 29 schools, the research team identified 34 indicators that differentiated writing scores and programs in *continuously improving* schools from those in *continuously declining* schools, of which all but one attained statistical significance. These indicators surpass the scope of professional development alone to address issues such as instructional strategies, administrative support, and family and community involvement.

Next, the collaborative research team evaluated the optimum method for assessing schools' needs relative to the indicators, deciding upon a self-study needs assessment instrument. The distinguishing characteristics of the study are that (1) it is to be conducted by schools themselves (led by an in-house faculty-based Steering Committee rather than a team of external evaluators) and (2) it has the capability to account for the perspectives of all role groups in the school in a compelling way, including students' perspectives. The study's power is principally derived from comparing the consistencies and inconsistencies among the different role groups' perspectives about the writing portfolio program.

The instrument is comprised of four operational elements, or *steps*, compiled in a single manual for the school's guidance. The four steps are (1) conducting interviews, (2) writing a report, (3) rating the school on the 34 indicators, and (4) setting priorities. The Steering Committee plans and carries out most of the tasks in the process except the interviews. The four role groups to be interviewed are teachers, students, the principal, and a district-level administrator. Based on the interview data, the Committee writes a report framed around the 34 indicators of successful writing programs. These data compilation steps culminate in a faculty-wide rating session led by the Committee. In the faculty-wide rating session, small groups use the report to rate the school on the indicators along a 7-point Likert-type scale. Eventually, the ratings are used to set priorities and plan actions for improvement of the writing program.

Describing the pilot test of this new needs assessment instrument, called the *School Study of Writing Instruction* (AEL & KDE, 1998), is the purpose of this report. The objectives of the pilot test were to assess the value of the study for schools, assess the level of external facilitator assistance needed by schools to carry it out, and assess the validity and reliability of the instrument itself. The *School Study of Writing Instruction* was pilot tested by two different methods. First and foremost, it was tested in its entirety in a small Kentucky elementary school (Method I, the *full model*). The pilot-test school was assigned an external observer from the collaborative research team, whose role evolved into one more closely resembling a facilitator. This development was advantageous in hindsight as it resulted in more complete findings from the pilot test. Second, the instrument was tested in sections by six educators around the state (Method II, the *sectional model*).

The self-study was successful for the pilot-test school in Method I. One observed outcome was the Steering Committee's practice of customizing the instrument while conducting the study, a noteworthy example of Berman and McLaughlin's (1975) concept of "mutual adaptation" in education innovation implementation (Hord, 1987). The facilitator attributed the school's success to a faculty sense of ownership of the program generated by faculty participation at the rating meeting. Moreover, the study process was efficient for the general faculty body; however, the compromise was that the process was time-intensive for the Steering Committee, as Committee members had been thorough in their planning and preparation. Yet overall, the process was parsimonious in that all steps up to, but not including, step 4 (the priorities) were accomplished in five weeks. Findings from Method II were also informative, though not as comprehensive as those from Method I. Participants in Method II, who tested sections of the instrument, were positive about the study's potential but concerned about the required time commitment.

The observer/facilitator's assistance was judged to be critical, but not constantly needed. In her account, her best service was pointing out the essential pages of the study manual to the Steering Committee at their initial planning meeting, thereby making the study process seem manageable and straightforward. It is recommended that schools undertaking the *School Study* in the future have access to some level of assistance, whether it is provided by in-house or external facilitators.

In Method I, a validity concern was identified in regard to transposing the interview data to the report, as well as other minor problems in the instrument. Although the Steering Committee's report captured essential highlights of the school's writing program, it seemed too brief. Revisions are proposed to the instrument to minimize threats to validity and reliability. Nevertheless, any residual invalidity and unreliability pale in significance to the high value of the study for faculty. It is more important for a faculty to be empowered by the study process than too concerned with the mechanics of it. The *School Study of Writing Instruction* (AEL & KDE, 1998) is designed to build capacity of schools to assess their own progress with respect to writing improvement. In this pilot test, the potential of the *School Study* to enable a school faculty to own the problems, data, and solutions related to its writing program was adequately demonstrated. It is recommended that the *School Study* be marketed nationwide to educators who wish to improve writing programs. Also, it is recommended that the *School Study*, as a model needs assessment instrument, be adapted to other content areas and marketed likewise.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the mandates of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) of 1990 is that every student develop a writing portfolio for which he/she is accountable at the 4th, 7th, and 12th grades (Kentucky Department of Education, 1994b, 1996, 1999). There are four benchmarks of achievement by which writing portfolios are judged: novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished. Schools are required by KERA to achieve an average of *proficient* on students' writing portfolios by 2010. However, since the inception of KERA, teachers have found it possible to move students from novice to apprentice, but more formidable to maneuver them to the next benchmark of proficient. Presently, many students at varying degrees of mastery have been appraised at the apprentice level. (Some teachers have voiced concern that the range of mastery within the apprentice benchmark is too wide. They feel that many students deserve to be evaluated at a higher level, and to adequately accommodate their range, intermediate benchmarks between apprentice and proficient should be created.) In 1996, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL), Inc. began a collaborative project to assist teachers in writing instruction and ultimately, to improve their students' writing portfolio scores (AEL, 1995, 1997a). The project, titled the Kentucky State Project: Designing Professional Development for Portfolio Improvement, shall be hereafter referred to as the *Kentucky writing project* or *project*.

Prior to the inception of the project, approximately 100 Kentucky schools were identified as having shown consistent gains in writing portfolio scores between 1991-1994 (AEL, 1995). Furthermore, although some have criticized the writing portfolio scoring process as being subjective, scoring audits showed that scores in these schools were more reliable than scores in less successful schools. To help less successful schools achieve these same gains, AEL and KDE were interested in a preliminary study to identify correlates of score gains in successful schools, possibly followed by the creation of new professional development materials and strategies (AEL, 1995). As stated in the project proposal, the original objectives of the research and development effort were (1) to establish correlates to gains in writing scores; (2) based on these correlates, to develop and field test new professional development materials to improve both teacher writing instruction and accuracy in scoring student portfolios, implement the new materials in a training program, and disseminate the materials statewide and nationally; and (3) to determine the applicability of the new professional development materials to content areas other than writing instruction.

The Kentucky writing project was conceived as an applied research and development effort. In the first meeting between KDE and AEL, the original objectives and activities of the project changed substantially (AEL, 1998a). Focus converged on the first objective, that of identifying correlates of writing score gains, later termed *quality indicators* or *indicators*. The second and third objectives of designing new professional development were put on hold, because key decision makers at KDE agreed that preliminary research into correlates of gains required in-depth attention. First, KDE staff proposed that advancing students to the proficient level requires a completely different set of teaching strategies than those that had been sufficient for getting students to the apprentice level (AEL, 1998a). Second, KDE hypothesized that perhaps other variables in addition to professional development and teaching strategies were decisive factors in successful schools'

continual improvement. Third, it was felt that the professional development already being provided by KDE was of good caliber: it was schools' level of participation in, not the content of, these programs that differentiated schools' writing programs. For these reasons, KDE decision makers were wary of prematurely designing new professional development materials as a quick fix for declining schools.

The initial proposal stipulated that interviews with various school stakeholders would be performed in a few schools to develop appropriate interview protocols and to begin the process of identifying correlates of gains in writing scores (AEL, 1995). Once the interview protocols were refined, a broad telephone survey of successful and unsuccessful schools would be conducted in order to establish these correlates of score gains (and conversely, the correlates of low or declining scores). However, the idea of a telephone survey had been dismissed early, also at the first KDE - AEL meeting, in favor of a more penetrating scrutiny. Key KDE decision makers felt that the examination needed to be more in-depth and continue to include the insights of the various stakeholders. AEL staff agreed with these recommendations and encouraged the inclusion of students as one of the stakeholder groups. A pervasive, in-depth examination could not be effectively accomplished by means of a telephone survey. Therefore, a series of site visits was planned instead for the purpose of identifying the correlates, or quality indicators.

At the second meeting, the KDE Writing Program staff, the KDE Regional Writing Consultants (then supervised by KDE, now by regional service centers), and various staff of AEL formed a *collaborative research team*, also referred to as the *research team* or *team*. The collaborative research team wrote interview protocols in preparation for site visits, and then refined them based on their use in exploratory visits to seven schools.

Based on a series of site visits to 22 of 43 continuously improving schools[1, 2], as well as the initial exploratory visits, data from KDE, and a review of relevant literature, 34 indicators of successful writing programs were identified. These indicators were subsequently tested for significance by comparison to 7 continuously declining schools[3]; 33 of the 34 indicators were found

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[1]*Continuously improving* and *continuously declining* are designations used by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to describe schools that meet specific criteria.

[2]For purposes of this project, the criteria for selecting continuously improving schools were altered to include only schools with writing score gains over a four-year, rather than a three-year, period. This narrowed the pool of schools with continuously improving writing programs from 100 to 43 (AEL, 1997a).

Also, it should be noted that 2 of the 43 continuously improving schools that the project team visited later merged. Therefore, the current pool of continuously improving schools numbers 42.

[3]These 7 schools came from a pool of 18 identified as continuously declining in their scores over four consecutive years. They should not be confused with the 7 schools observed in the initial exploratory visits.

to be significant[4] (AEL, 1997b; Coe et al., 1999). In sum, through site visits to many Kentucky schools, more than 100 teachers, 200 students, and 50 administrators were interviewed to establish the 34 indicators (AEL, 1997b). These indicators encompassed issues such as administrative support, writing program coordination, and family and community involvement, in addition to the expected salient issues such as instructional strategies and professional development.[5]

The strong emergence of a group of indicators related to teacher participation in professional development confirmed the wisdom of having modified an original objective to create new professional development programs immediately. In testing these indicators between improving and declining writing programs, it was found that schools in which teachers had participated in professional development opportunities already available through the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) were more likely to evidence improved student writing than schools with untrained teachers. Thus the more salient need related to these indicators appeared to be heightening teacher participation in existing professional development, not revamping the programs themselves.

The second activity to emerge out of the modified objectives of this project was the development of a comprehensive needs assessment instrument, which was based on the indicators identified in the first activity. The needs assessment instrument originated from the collaborative research team's activities in the process of identifying the indicators. It was very much an iterative design which grew out of using and revising the interview protocols in the series of site visits and writing the reports of findings from each school. Based on these activities, the research team (1) confirmed that talking to students was indispensable in evaluating a school's writing program and (2) decided that writing the reports would be a valuable activity for stimulating schools' self-awareness. Thus the team envisioned an instrument whereby schools, led by an in-house faculty-based Steering Committee, could assess for themselves the strengths and weaknesses of their writing program relative to the indicators, the key operational elements being input from all school stakeholders and self- (versus external) evaluation. Thus was conceived and developed a *self-study* needs assessment for schools called the *School Study of Writing Instruction* (AEL, 1997a; AEL & KDE, 1998). Henceforth, it shall be referred to as the *School Study*, *self-study*, *study*, *manual*, or *instrument*. In accordance with the intent of KDE and AEL decision makers, the collaborative research team had designed an insightful approach for eliciting the voices of all school stakeholders, particularly those of students. The *School Study* is the instrument under consideration in this report.

In this report, attention is given to the prospect of providing external assistance to schools that may conduct the self-study in the future. Based upon observations made during site visits,

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[4]The non-significant indicator was *Evidence teachers write with students*. Its non-significance was attributed to two skewed means among the group of continuously declining schools.

[5]Only low, non-significant correlations were found between writing portfolio scores and characteristics such as class size, school size, number of grades, and socioeconomic status (SES) (AEL, 1998a; Coe et al., 1999). In other words, writing improvement does not bear a noticeable relationship to school structure or demographic make-up of schools. Thus, it is the actions that schools do or do not take relative to the indicators, rather than any unchangeable characteristics that schools possess, which formatively contribute to their improvement or decline.

technical assistance was identified as a potential need for schools to successfully conduct the study. Thus, an *observer* was assigned to the pilot-test school to gauge this need and serve in a limited capacity as a contact person. However, as the observer's role sometimes included functions more characteristic of a facilitator, she shall be referred to henceforth as the *observer/facilitator* or simply *facilitator*.

The remainder of this report describes the pilot testing of the *School Study of Writing Instruction* in one school (the full model) and, secondarily, the testing of parts of it by a few other entities (the sectional model). Implications for the field test and the instrument's final implementation are considered. The field test is scheduled for the spring of 1999 at 11 schools across the eight regions of Kentucky. This instrument has the potential of being widely used to build schools' capacity for improvement in writing instruction, including but not limited to the enhancement of professional development of teachers (the original goal of the Kentucky writing project).

**Objectives**

The three objectives of this report are to

1. assess the value of the self-study process for schools desiring to improve their writing program

2. assess the level of facilitator assistance required by schools to successfully conduct the self-study

3. assess the validity and reliability of the pilot version of the *School Study of Writing Instruction* manual for the purpose of improving the field test and final versions (AEL, 1997a)

**Audience**

The primary audience for this report is the collaborative research team of the Kentucky writing project: the Kentucky Department of Education Writing Program staff, the Kentucky Regional Writing Consultants, and the AEL staff members assigned to the project. A secondary audience is the Kentucky State Caucus of the AEL Board of Directors, which acts as an advisory group to this project. Other audiences include those interested in needs assessment instruments, specifically school self-studies of curricular programs, and those interested in school writing programs.

## METHODS

The method is divided into two parts. The *School Study* was tested in a setting of use in its entirety (Method I, the full model), and sections of the instrument were either pilot tested or reviewed by other individuals (Method II, the sectional model). The method and findings from Method I are more substantial and germane to this discovery, so are described in much greater detail. First, the data sources used for this report are listed.

### Data Sources

Eight data sources were used to complete this report as described below.

**Steering Committee Feedback Form** (data source for Method I only). The facilitator at the pilot-test school presented a brief form of 10 questions to the faculty-based Steering Committee upon the school's completion of its study. Questions asked about time estimates in completing their tasks, the nature of their planning, their perceived need for facilitator assistance, and the utility of the study. The Steering Committee submitted their responses collectively on one form.

**Principal Feedback Form** (Method I only). The facilitator presented a form of four questions to the principal at the conclusion of the study. All questions centered on the utility of the study.

**Facilitator Log** (Method I only). The facilitator kept a log of how the pilot-test school carried out the steps specified in the *School Study* manual.

**Debriefing Meeting of the Collaborative Research Team and Transcript** (Method I only). Less than a month after the completion of the pilot test, the school facilitator elaborated on the school's study process and her role as observer/facilitator for the research team. The meeting was taped and transcribed.

**Interviews with the Facilitator** (Method I only). Four informal phone interviews were held with the facilitator to glean additional detail about how the school carried out the study.

**Reactions Form** (data source for Method II only). Participants who tested sections of the instrument were mailed this form along with their testing package. It consists of five questions, three of them in two parts, which solicit opinions about the clarity of manual instructions, time estimates to complete the steps, the utility of the study for middle and high schools in particular, and circumstances that would propel middle and high school faculties to undertake the self-study.

**AEL Meetings and Notes** (data source for both Methods I and II). At five meetings of the AEL contingent of the research team over the course of two and a half months, the author

gathered background information about the Kentucky writing project and details about the pilot test. Notes of these meetings were consulted for writing this report.

**Cassette Tape** (both Methods I and II). A member of the collaborative research team recorded highlights of the pilot-test background and findings for the author of this report.

## Method I: Testing the *School Study of Writing Instruction* in Its Entirety in a Setting of Use (The Full Model)

### Participants

An elementary school with 244 students in grades K-6 and approximately 25 teachers was chosen for pilot testing the entire instrument (Quality Education Data [QED], 1998). The school is located in an urban fringe of a mid-size city of western Kentucky (Burczyk, 1998). In this school's district, 12% of the student population qualify for Title I funds, 90% are white and 9% black (QED, 1998). The faculty accepted the invitation to participate in a full faculty meeting at which the principal briefly outlined the study and its purpose, and assured them of confidentiality. The principal was new to the school during the 1998-99 school year.

### Materials

Since the *School Study of Writing Instruction* (1998) is new and unestablished in the field, care is taken in this section to describe it accurately (Huck, Cormier, & Bounds, 1974). The study is a process divided into four main steps: (1) the interviews, (2) the report, (3) the ratings, and (4) the priorities. The interview questions, report topics, and rating categories correspond to the 34 quality indicators of improving writing portfolio scores. They deal with issues of administrative support, professional development, school climate, writing program coordination, focus on writing portfolios and writing in general, instructional strategies, family and community involvement, and assessment of the writing program's value for students. The interviews are the data upon which all subsequent analyses on the indicators are based. They are the linchpin because they come from four different role groups (district administrator, principal, teachers, and students), thus serving as a medium for closely comparing different parties' experiences and perceptions of the writing program.

The *School Study* is in manual format in a three-ring binder. It is comprised of an introductory overview and letter to the Steering Committee, as well as a section for each of the four main steps listed above. Also, all the forms for use in each step are compiled on computer disk. The overview includes a "Time and Task Summary" that allots an estimated completion time for each of the activities involved in the four steps (see Appendix B). The confidentiality and in-house use of the information gathered are emphasized several times throughout the manual. The entire process as outlined in the manual is summarized below.

Engaging Faculty Buy-in and Forming the Steering Committee

Before the study is begun, it needs to be introduced to and supported by the faculty. If the faculty express a wish to undertake the study, a Steering Committee is formed. The Steering Committee is responsible for planning and carrying out the steps in the study, which culminates in a faculty-wide school analysis conducted during one or two meetings. The manual estimates "one month with focused attention" as the time frame for completion. The Committee is composed of at least four individuals. To ensure diverse representation, it should include at least one teacher who either leads the writing program or is portfolio-accountable, one who is portfolio-nonaccountable due to grade level, and one from a content area other than language arts. A parent may be included, preferably from the School Decision Making Council if one exists. Also if feasible, a community member possessing some familiarity with the writing program may be invited. Upon its formation, the Steering Committee first chooses a Chair.

Planning Meetings and Other Preparation

Although implied that the Steering Committee would have to meet together to plan the course of the study, no specific guidance is provided in the manual about how best to accomplish this, except for periodic reminders to have sufficient numbers of relevant forms copied prior to the various steps in the process.

The Four Steps of the Self-Study Process

**1. The Interviews.** The interviews represent the data collection phase of the self-study. There are four role groups to be interviewed: students, teachers, the principal, and a district-level administrator. Depending on the size of the school, between 10-14 students and 3-10 teachers should be interviewed.

The Steering Committee must select interviewees in the teacher and student role groups by stratified random sampling. For teachers, the school's writing leader(s) are automatically included. Then other teachers' names are drawn at random from various bowls. To ensure that a diverse sample is interviewed, teachers' names are distributed among different bowls before random drawing occurs, depending on whether they are portfolio-accountable or not. Also, a variety of content areas, grade levels, and tracks should be represented in the final sample.

Then the students are selected randomly, but *only from the classes of the teachers who were themselves selected as interviewees*. The student interviewees need to come from the classes of the teacher interviewees for meaningful comparison and contrast of responses about writing program practices. A range of numbers representing the largest class is placed in a bowl. As a number is drawn from the bowl, it is counted down on the first teacher's roster; the name at that place on the roster is the student chosen to be interviewed. The next number drawn is counted down the next teacher's roster, and so on. If a number drawn is higher than the number of students in a particular class, another number is drawn.

The principal interviewee is the school principal. Finally, the district administrator designated as the interviewee should be the administrator most closely involved with the writing program.

After selecting the interviewees, the Steering Committee recruits other individuals to serve as the interviewer(s) of the role groups. The interviewer(s) should not be well-known to the interviewees. Possible interviewers are teachers from other schools, district or regional staff, experienced interviewers from the community, or college students. Even middle or high school students may be selected to interview students from other schools below their grade level.

If the Steering Committee desires, two Committee members (vs. the interviewer[s]) may conduct the principal and/or district administrator interviews. The primary benefit in doing so would be that the Steering Committee members could gain valuable insight into administrator perspectives. Furthermore, in the case of the principal, it is impossible to provide anonymity (unless there are two principals), so it is unnecessary for the principal's interviewer to be someone unknown to her/him.

The Steering Committee should train the interviewer(s) in proper techniques and confidentiality according to their level of interviewing expertise, helping with practice sessions or a few joint interviews as necessary. If possible, it is recommended that interviewers work in pairs, so that one person can ask the questions while the other records responses and manipulates a tape recorder. One of the most important instructions to interviewers is to read over the interview forms prior to conducting any interviews. Another major instruction is to avoid being repetitive—in particular, to avoid asking a question if the interviewee has already answered it via an unanticipated response to a previous question. For interviewees' comfort, it is recommended that students be interviewed in groups of two or three and teachers individually. If it is impossible to schedule an interview with a teacher, the interviewer may opt to provide the teacher with the interview form and ask her/him to complete it in writing as if it were a survey.

The interview form for teachers has 47 questions; for students and the principal, each 32 questions; and for the district administrator, 16 questions. The estimated time to conduct an interview is 30-45 minutes; one interview per 50-minute class period allows time for regrouping between interviews. The estimated total time spent by the interviewer(s) is 10-14 hours, depending on the number of interviewees.

The purpose of the interviews is to gain a comprehensive body of information for use as raw data. People interviewed from the four role groups are asked questions pertaining to similar topics. The level of agreement in responses within and among groups yields cardinal information about the sophistication and coordination of the writing program, which is then translated to the report (step 2).

In addition to the interviews, one other data source is the Resource Inventory that lists writing program resources available in the school, to be completed by the principal or her/his designee.

**2. The Report.** The report, written by the Steering Committee, is a synthesis of responses from the 15-26 interviews (see Appendix C). On the report form, the 34 indicators are recast as *report topics* and further grouped under 16 themes. Under each topic on the report form, space is provided for the response of each role group relevant to that topic, (i.e., for the report topic, "Family Involvement," what did the district administrator have to say? the principal? the teachers? the students?). As appropriate, some report topics call for the response of only some of the role groups, such as "Professional Development," which calls for the response of all groups except students. Also, to capture any additional first-hand knowledge of the report writers not elicited from the interviews, a space labeled "Other" is provided under each report topic. Because this exercise involves merging the information given by various individuals in the separate interviews, the interview data begin to form an integrated picture of the writing program at this step.

A large number of interview questions (between 16-47 questions per individual interview) have to be assembled into a meaningful report. As an aid to the Steering Committee as they link interview questions to report topics, a data reference table called the "Table of report sections and data" is included in the manual (see Appendix D). Instructions explain that some interview questions may be referred to more than once under different report topics. Also, some questions may not be specifically indicated; in some instances, the table refers the writer to the entire interview of a particular role group to address a report topic.

In the table, the 34 report topics are divided between 8 sections. (The report topics represent the indicators, whereas the sections reflect artificial distinctions created solely to help the Steering Committee divide the report writing among themselves.) The Committee members divide the eight sections in a way they prefer, although it is recommended that no individual be assigned more than two sections. If necessary, the Committee can enlist others to join them in writing the report.

The manual instructs the report writers to first scan each interview in its entirety; then sort teachers by their writing program accountability and students by grade level; then answer each report topic, reading all the questions from each relevant interview as referenced in the table. With brevity in mind, each answer should summarize the common view and note any divergent views.

The instructions in the manual predict report writing to be the step that takes the most time for the Steering Committee. The estimated time needed per person is 1-2 hours for two report sections; thus the estimated cumulative time spent by all individuals is 4-8 hours. A sample report is provided in the manual to give the report developers an idea of the breadth called for in the report. Also, the manual suggests that upon finishing their individually assigned sections, Committee members may hire someone or solicit a volunteer to type the complete report.

The purpose of the report is to create a holistic portrait of the school's writing program that especially highlights strengths, weaknesses, consistencies, and inconsistencies. In the indicator identification phase of this project, the team found that high consistency among role groups' responses to interview questions was prevalent in improving schools (AEL, 1997b). Conversely, the team expects incongruous responses within and among role groups to reveal the tenuous

elements of a school's writing program. Student interviews especially are integral to uncovering problematic elements in the writing program: their "customer" experience of the writing program in comparison to teachers' beliefs about the experience may reveal more than only "supplier" descriptions given by administrators and teachers.

**3. The Ratings**. The full faculty is convened by the Steering Committee to produce the school's ratings, which are based on the report. A few days prior to the meeting, the Steering Committee (or clerical helpers) will have copied and distributed the completed report to all faculty, requesting that they read it before the meeting.

At the meeting, faculty are divided into small groups of three to five participants, which may or may not have been prearranged by the Steering Committee. If necessary, smaller schools may have only two individuals per small group; the number per group should not exceed five, even in larger schools. The groups should be interdisciplinary, mixed by department and grade level, each including a language arts or writing program knowledgeable person to the degree possible. Each small group then chooses a group leader and another person to act as the recorder.

Four documents are used to mark ratings:

a. the report, which each individual has brought with her/him (Appendix C)

b. a rating guide, given to each group (Appendix E)

c. a blank rating form, given to each individual (Appendix F)

d. a blank school profile, to be filled out at a later time (Appendix G)

The rating guide gives authentic field-based examples of schools operating at high, medium, and low performance for each of the report topics on a 3-point Likert-type scale. The rating form consists of a 7-point Likert-type scale per topic ranging between low and high. Finally, the school profile is a bar graph representation of the rating form results.

Prior to faculty breaking into small groups, the Steering Committee briefly entertains questions about the report. Then the method for rating the topics is explained, including how to resolve discrepant ratings and reach consensus. In the manual, this exercise in discussing differences is strongly emphasized as a means in its own right for facilitating better understanding of the writing program among staff.

For the purpose of rating, the report is divided into equivalent sections according to the number of small groups. Once in groups, participants read the examples in the rating guide; compare them to the corresponding topics in the report; discuss them; then give a rating to each of the report topics in their assigned section, recording the results on their rating forms.

If there is time remaining, the meeting leader can read each group's ratings aloud so that everyone can complete their own form and discuss the various groups' ratings. Each group should be prepared to discuss their findings, particularly the topics on which they had difficulty reaching consensus. If there is no time left, it is announced that the Steering Committee will develop the school profile based on the composite ratings and distribute a copy to everyone. If the Steering Committee has decided that the full faculty (vs. a committee) will set the writing program priorities, the next meeting should be announced, at which faculty can further share and discuss findings. The estimated time for the rating session is 2-3 hours.

The explicit purpose of the faculty rating session is to apply a quantitative interpretation to the qualitative analysis given in the report. The implicit, yet more significant, purpose is to fully engage faculty in discussion of their writing program.

**4. The Priorities.** This step is actually comprised of two activities: setting priorities and planning actions. The Steering Committee may choose one of two groups to set the school's priorities—either a designated committee, such as the School Consolidated Planning Committee, or the full faculty. Regardless of which option is chosen, requisite materials to be supplied include the completed school profile, the report, the rating guide, and guidance questions for targeting indicators as improvement priorities. If the committee option is chosen, committee members receive a few additional guides such as examples of effective practices from other Kentucky schools and the Resource Inventory completed by the principal.

If the faculty option is chosen for setting priorities, the Steering Committee schedules another 2-hour faculty meeting. At the meeting, faculty break into interdisciplinary and/or cross-grade groups of five. They are instructed to target one to three indicators for improvement. Each group's choices are reported to the whole body and hung on large newsprint paper. Next, weighted voting takes place, with each participant placing between one and three adhesive dots by their top priorities. For instance, each participant receives three dots; they could place all three of their dots by one indicator or place one dot each by three different indicators. The three indicators with the most dots are selected as priorities.

Whether a committee or the faculty sets priorities, participants should base their judgments on the data and guidance materials provided them. The manual gives suggestions about how to make informed decisions in targeting priorities. The main suggestion is to target indicators that are most meaningful to the school, rather than target the lowest-rated indicators just because they are the lowest. Two completed school profiles, one an average of the continuously improving schools studied and the other an average of the continuously declining schools, are supplied in the manual for reference; they are not intended for use as standards by which to target priorities for a specific school.

For the second part of step 4, planning actions, the manual recommends that a designated committee such as the School Consolidated Planning Committee fulfill this task. The committee

plans actions based on the priorities set by them or the faculty, using any relevant materials mentioned previously.

Setting priorities and planning actions are the crowning elements of the school's exploration of their writing program, attained through a progression from the interviews to the report to the rating session (and resultant school profile). The purpose of the process is to highlight and verify the school's most distinct needs, and to galvanize excitement for and give direction to an improved writing program.

**Procedure**

One copy of the manual was mailed to the pilot test school, along with a version on disk in WordPerfect 8.0, in early November 1998. As an incentive to pilot test the instrument, a stipend of $1,500 was provided by KDE to the school.

As the collaborative research team prepared for the pilot test, a critical question concerned how much facilitator assistance to provide to the school as it proceeded through the self-study process. It was conjectured that assistance would be most crucial for training the interviewer(s) and writing the report. Initially, the team planned to test six schools, two at each of three conditions of facilitation level: stand alone (i.e., no facilitation), local facilitation, and regional facilitation (AEL, 1998b). However, since a more expansive field test was already planned, in the interests of time and feasibility, the team decided to test just one school with an *observer* assigned to them who would monitor their progress and give suggestions only minimally. A retired Regional Writing Consultant (and "ex officio" member of the collaborative research team) was hired to serve as an observer of the pilot-test school. However, her role became one more closely approximating an observer/facilitator in the process of the pilot test.

Once the school had completed the study, the Steering Committee and principal gave feedback to the project team. Also, they gave permission for their findings to be reviewed by the team so that a qualitative assessment of the validity and reliability of the instrument could be made.

A debriefing meeting among the Kentucky writing project team was held afterwards for the dual purpose of discussing the outcomes of the pilot test and preparing writing consultants for their upcoming facilitator/contact person role in the field test. At this meeting, and by phone and notes thereafter, the pilot-test facilitator described the pilot school's experience in-depth.

**The Process in Action: The School's Experience Conducting a Self-Study Using the *School Study of Writing Instruction* Manual**

This section describes the *School Study of Writing Instruction* actually in use in the pilot-test school. The process is described according to the outline of the manual as given above in the Materials section.

Engaging Faculty Buy-in and Forming the Steering Committee

The faculty accepted the invitation to participate in the self-study in a full faculty meeting on November 9, 1998, at which the principal briefly outlined the study and its purpose. Also, the faculty was assured that the study would be an exercise for their benefit and that the results would not be shared outside the school.

Once the pilot-test school had agreed to undertake an evaluation of their writing program, five teachers were nominated by the principal and confirmed by the faculty to form the Steering Committee. A few were obvious choices given their writing program accountability and/or involvement, yet all members participated voluntarily. No parents or community members were on the Committee. Also, the faculty agreed that the stipend should be divided among the Steering Committee members. The Committee had five weeks from the date of this meeting to plan and complete the study.

Planning Meetings and Other Preparation

It is noteworthy that the two meetings and other preparation time described next are planning steps conceived and executed on the initiative of the Steering Committee. Although the necessity to plan is clearly indicated, an outline for how this should be done is not provided in the manual. Planning decisions were made in the following two meetings that remarkably enhanced the fluidity of the undertaking:

**1. First Meeting (half organizational and half planning).** The observer/facilitator joined the Steering Committee at their initial meeting on November 16, 1998. She surveyed the self-study process with them, referring first to the overview section in the manual and its accompanying time line chart. As delineated at the debriefing meeting of the collaborative research team, the facilitator took crucial actions in handling this overview that greatly influenced the course of the study for the Steering Committee members.

First, she navigated the overview in a very general fashion. She felt that it was critical that the Committee not be overburdened with the whole process at the outset. Therefore, after touching on the main steps, she concentrated only on step 1, the interviews.

Second, she scanned the manual with them, pointing out which pages provided instructions that the Steering Committee needed to absorb versus which pages were merely for recording data.

and pointing out which steps required completion "now" versus "later." She did this for each step of the manual. As a result, according to the facilitator, the Steering Committee felt that the project was not as overwhelming as it had first appeared. By breaking down a fairly large book (an average binder—not oversized), the facilitator proved to the Committee that the study was a straightforward process. She suggested that they read the manual in more depth later as needed.

Third, she assured the Committee that she would show them how to do the study in the least amount of time. This meeting was held one week after the buy-in meeting, so the Committee had only four weeks from the time of this meeting to complete the study. Fourth, she reassured them of the confidentiality of the process.

Following the overview, the Committee began planning. They elected a Chair and set activity deadlines and meeting dates for the course of the study. Next, they turned their attention solely to preparing for step 1, coordinating the interviews: selecting the interviewer, choosing the district administrator interviewee, and discussing and conducting a preliminary selection process for teacher and student interviewees. They had no difficulty selecting an interviewer relatively unknown to the school. They considered several possibilities, including a parent; a writing resource teacher; a district administrator; a college student intern; and an instructional aide new to the school, the latter being whom they chose. The Committee did not entertain the idea of asking a middle or high school student, a possibility suggested in the manual. They chose only one interviewer in order to minimize the time needed for training.

Concerning selection of interviewees, teachers were randomly selected to some degree. Being a small school, two of six teacher interviewees were intentionally selected because of their involvement with the writing program. These two were also members of the Steering Committee. In order to ensure a cross-section based on writing program accountability, discipline, and grade level, the remaining four teacher interviewees were randomly selected. Ten student interviewees were selected by stratified random sampling as outlined in the manual; they were selected *on the day of their interviews* to avoid any teacher bearing on student responses.

**2. Second Meeting (remainder of planning).** This meeting was held on November 30, 1998, after the interviews had taken place. In this meeting, the Committee prepared for steps 2, 3, and 4. In preparation for step 2, writing the report, the Committee divided the report writing task among themselves according to the eight sections proposed in the manual. There were five members on the Committee; since the Committee Chair had undertaken the job of merging the teacher and student interviews onto one form each, the remaining four excused her and assumed the report writing task themselves. They initially planned to meet as a foursome after school for 3 hours, but this proved to be inconvenient given personal commitments. They also considered working individually, but finally settled upon working in pairs, which meant that four report sections were assigned to each of the two pairs. Being exempt from report writing, the Chair offered to type the aggregate report upon receipt of the finished sections and serve as a resource person for those doing the writing.

In preparation for step 3, rating the school on the indicators, the Committee preassigned faculty to small groups for the upcoming session, and decided that they themselves would serve as the small group leaders. By prearranging small groups prior to the rating session, the Committee captured several inherent planning advantages.

First, they could divide up the report topics among the groups ahead of time. A table in the manual partitions the report into six sections based on a hypothetical school with six groups, yet a school may have a greater or fewer number of groups. In addition, knowing which report topics are assigned per group lets the Committee know which rating guide sections to copy for each group and make a sufficient number of copies.

Second, by knowing the number of groups, the Committee would know the number of small group leaders needed. Although the manual did not present pre-appointing the leaders as an option, the Committee did so. Moreover, they decided to lead the groups themselves because (1) they felt responsible since they were the group asked to manage the study and (2) their familiarity with the task to be done would make the rating session progress more efficiently. The facilitator helping them with the study was asked to lead one of the small groups because there were not enough members on the Steering Committee.

Third, by constructing groups in advance, the Committee could ensure that small groups were as interdisciplinary as possible—mixed by department, writing program familiarity, and grade level. Fourth, the Committee notified faculty members of their group assignment and gave them the option of meeting prior to the rating session.

Having devised the structure of the rating session, the Committee then familiarized themselves with the procedures. At this juncture, they made three plans that departed from the manual. One, they anticipated that the session would take a whole day, more than the 2-3 hours estimated in the manual. Two, even allowing for a whole day, they anticipated that the groups might not finish their ratings. They estimated that each group could finish rating two topics (out of five or six per group), so they set that as a minimum goal. Three, in the event that they should run out of time, the Committee formed a backup plan to finish the ratings themselves and share the collective results with the faculty at a later time.

In preparation for step 4, setting priorities, the Committee made decisions about targeting indicators as priorities. First, regardless of the results of the ratings, they wanted to target items related to instructional strategies and professional development. Second, they would review indicators that rated high and those that rated low, but they would ignore mid-lying ones. They decided that ultimately, they would assign both parts of step 4 to the School Consolidated Planning Committee, instead of to the faculty. They felt that an additional faculty meeting for setting priorities would be burdensome, especially given the small window of time in which they were operating.

**3. Individual Time.** Each Steering Committee member spent a few hours reading the manual.

The Four Steps of the Self-Study Process

**1. The Interviews.** The interviewer interviewed six teachers and ten students.[6] She also interviewed the district administrator, while a Steering Committee member interviewed the principal. An option provided in the manual, which the committee dismissed, was to administer the teacher interview as a written survey. The Steering Committee speculated that a survey would be too cumbersome because respondents might deliberate too long over their answers and make them too lengthy, making report writing arduous for the Committee. Therefore, each teacher chosen was interviewed orally. The Committee did, however, choose the option in the manual to interview students in groups. After a practice interview, which involved three students, the decision was made to interview students in pairs only. According to the facilitator, more than two was too many.

The interviewer read the interview forms ahead of time, observed the facilitator as she modeled an interview, and had one practice session aided by the facilitator. In this interview, both asked questions and recorded replies, alternating per question, rather than dividing the two tasks between themselves as the manual had suggested. The interviewer performed all other interviews by herself without difficulty in about 14 hours, in comparison to the manual's projection of 12 hours. (The projection is 10-14 hours based on the number of interviewees; thus the calculated projection for this school would be 12 hours.) Furthermore, with few exceptions, she was able to conduct the interviews within the estimated time frame of 30-45 minutes per interview, including the paired student interviews. The exceptions were a few of the student interviews, which lasted slightly longer if the students were eager to share their opinions. While writing up the interviews, the interviewer found that she relied more heavily on tapes of the interviews than her notes. She did not use a computer during the interviews.

At this juncture, the Steering Committee customized the process prescribed in the manual. The Steering Committee Chair decided to merge the teacher and student interviews onto one form each—an aggregate form of responses from six teachers and an aggregate form of responses from ten students. This emerged as a key contribution of the pilot test. It is especially germane to larger schools: instead of the report writers having to wade through several questions each from 15-26 interviews just to answer one report topic, by merging interviews from like role groups, the writers will never have to look at more than 4 forms to answer a topic (district administrator, principal, aggregate teacher, aggregate student).[7] After receiving the completed interviews from the

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[6]Upon the facilitator's request, the Committee selected more teachers and students to interview than necessary given their small population, so that the time spent by the pilot-test school could be more defensibly generalized to larger schools undertaking the study in the future.

[7]Note that by merging the teacher and student interviews onto one form each, sorting teacher interviews by type and student interviews by grade level before writing the report becomes moot. It is unnecessary to draw a priori distinctions between them by type/level anyway unless actually warranted by the data.

interviewer, the Chair typed the interview responses directly onto the forms provided on disk using a laptop computer.[8]

**2. The Report.** Based on the data from the four role groups (the district administrator and principal interviews, and the teacher and student composite interviews), the Steering Committee wrote the report. Since the Steering Committee Chair had done the work of compressing the interviews, the other Committee members divided the actual report writing among themselves, reserving only the report typing for the Chair.

Each of the two pairs of Committee members had four sections to complete. As planned, each individual worked alone on her four assigned sections and then met with her partner to synthesize their answers. Each spent 2-3 hours on the task, including individual and partner time. In her quasi-facilitator role, the Chair was consulted minimally, if at all. It is estimated that the Chair spent approximately 3 hours assembling the report sections and typing the collective report. As with the interviews, she typed it directly onto the forms provided on disk. The total time spent by all Committee members to complete the report was 12-15 hours versus the original estimate of 4-8 hours.

**3. The Ratings.** Five weeks after the initial buy-in meeting, on December 15, 1998, the full faculty was reconvened to rate the writing program. As explained earlier in the planning section, the Steering Committee had preassigned small groups and given them the option of meeting before the rating session, though none did. However, everyone had received a copy of the report with instructions to read it before the meeting. There were six small groups, three to four members per group, in accordance with the manual's recommendation. The Steering Committee members, plus the facilitator, led the small groups.[9] Faculty were immediately directed to their group at the start of the meeting. The principal had intended to be present but was called away unexpectedly.

To start, participants were reminded that their ratings would not be shared outside the school. Then each group together read aloud the rating guide examples that pertained to the report topics they were charged with rating (about six topics per group). After discussing each topic and comparing it to the rating guide, reaching the highest degree of consensus possible, they rated each topic on the rating form. Faculty found the rating process to be natural and experiential; according to the facilitator, they had no difficulty translating the 3-point examples in the guide to the 7-point scale on the rating form. (However, a few examples in the rating guide and their corresponding items on the rating form and school profile were omitted, so faculty skipped these topics.) Instead of each group sharing their results verbally with the large group and individuals filling out their blank rating form, each group immediately transferred their ratings directly to a common school

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[8]The manual was provided on disk in WordPerfect 8.0 software; although Kentucky schools use Microsoft Word, opening and using the file was not a difficulty since the two programs are compatible.

[9]In the manual, the small group leaders are called *small group facilitators*. So as not to confuse the small group facilitators with the facilitator assigned to help the school with this study, they will be called *leaders* in this report.

profile: as each group completed its ratings, they submitted them to the Steering Committee Chair, who filled out the aggregate school profile and displayed it on an overhead projector. At this point, large-group discussion took place to reach consensus once again as differences in opinion surfaced. Discrepant viewpoints requiring additional discussion were typically voiced by teachers who had not been interviewees. The school profile was finalized later based on the discussion. Both in the small-group and large-group forums, all faculty actively participated in discussion, according to the facilitator.

During their earlier planning meeting, the Committee had set a goal for each rating group to rate at least two topics (about one third of the ratings), expecting it would take a full day to do that much. However, the manual estimate is that *all* ratings can be completed in just 2-3 hours. Thus the Steering Committee had estimated that the faculty would require much more time for the rating session than suggested in the manual.

To the Committee's pleasant surprise, not only did the small groups complete all ratings in keeping with the manual time estimate of 2-3 hours, but together as a large group, they also completed the school profile and began preliminary work on setting priorities within that time. Thus the faculty accomplished about two times more work than expected within the time frame given in the manual. As intended, faculty targeted indicators for improvement based on their value to the school rather than indicators that were lowest-rated. The indicators they chose were low but not the lowest. Also, as earlier planned by the Steering Committee, faculty selected indicators related to professional development and instructional strategies.

**4. The Priorities.** Although the faculty had begun the work of setting priorities in the rating session, the Steering Committee had earlier chosen to have the School Consolidated Planning Committee (SCPC) plan the priorities as well as the actions. Since priority setting had prematurely commenced in the rating session, the SCPC was requested to use the faculty's work as a basis and return to them at a later time with recommendations for priorities. The new actions SCPC would develop would be incorporated into the next year's school plan. These activities would occur after the one-month time frame set in the manual for completing the entire self-study.

The school later communicated through the facilitator the need for more guidance for incorporating new actions into the school plan. A guide and sample were subsequently dispatched to the school.

### Method II: Testing the *School Study of Writing Instruction* in Sections with Various Entities (The Sectional Model)

Sections of the *School Study of Writing Instruction* were tested by individuals representing various entities in lieu of pilot testing the entire instrument at additional schools. The main impetus for this method was to gather some understanding of how well the instrument would work in schools at the middle and high school levels.

**Participants**

Seven educators from four Kentucky school regions were asked to participate: 5 followed through with their task, while 2 agreed to participate but did not complete their task. One respondent also enlisted her spouse to pilot her assigned section, bringing the total number of participants to 6. Of these, 1 was a regional social studies consultant, 1 a regional language arts consultant, 1 a high school teacher, 1 a middle school teacher, and 2 were current regional writing consultants (and new members of the collaborative research team) who had recently worked as either a middle or high school teacher. Finally, insofar as these "primary" subjects engaged the participation of others in their pilot testing, there were additional uncounted "secondary" subjects.

**Materials**

The sections of the instrument either reviewed or pilot tested in Method II were as follows: the guidelines for teacher and student interviewee selection and preparing interviewers (part of step 1, the interviews), the teacher interview/survey (also step 1), and the student interview (also step 1); the report writing instructions (part of step 2, the report); and setting priorities (step 4, part of the priorities). No part of the ratings section (step 3) was reviewed because it had been given to one of the nonrespondents. A detailed description of the steps of the instrument is provided under the Materials subheading in the Method I section of this report.

**Procedure**

Depending on the step involved, participants were asked to either review or pilot test their section. Each subject was supplied with the following: an introductory letter explaining the rationale for the *School Study of Writing Instruction* and the questions to be answered in the pilot test, an article describing the background work to the *School Study* (i.e., the establishment of indicators for improving writing programs [see Appendix A]), overview materials from the manual, instructions for pilot testing their designated section of the manual, their designated manual section, and a reaction form. Those participants piloting aspects of the interviewing process engaged other faculty and students in the task. Also, these participants were told to complete just part of an interview and then estimate the completion time. A nominal stipend of $50 was provided to the 6 participants upon receipt of their completed reaction form.

The reaction form posed five questions, three of them in two parts. The questions asked whether

1. directions were clear and complete

2. time estimates were realistic

3. a. circumstances existed in middle or high schools that would prevent them from undertaking the study
   b. availability of outside assistance would be critical in the decision of middle or high schools to undertake the study

4. a. schools would feel a need to do such a study
   b. (what) would be the impetus for schools to do the study

5. a. the manual was "user-friendly" for middle and high school faculty
   b. any improvements could be made

**The Process in Reflection: Summary of Reaction Forms to Sections of the *School Study of Writing Instruction***

In response to question 1 on the reaction form, all 6 respondents said that directions were clear, well-detailed, or well-organized.

In response to question 2, all 6 respondents said that time estimates were realistic, but half added that the process seemed time-consuming. One respondent expressed concern that the time burden would fall on a minority of motivated teachers. Despite the perception of the time commitment required, those participants who piloted either the teacher or student interviews were able to stay within the estimated time frame per each interview. One respondent suggested that a recommendation be included in the manual of the best time in the school year to initiate the study, her suggestion being the spring.

In response to question 3a regarding circumstances that would prevent a middle or high school from undertaking the study, 1 respondent said none exist, 3 named time involvement, 1 observed that interviewing middle and high school students in groups would be unfavorable, and 1 named both of the latter two concerns. Two of those who mentioned time involvement were respondents who piloted aspects of the interviewing process; they tied their concern about time directly to the time involvement required for the interviewing process (the whole process, not an interview session), and advocated for teachers to receive release time and/or helpers to participate in the process. (According to the manual, teachers do not actually conduct the interviews—the responses of these two participants indicate that they did not understand this. Nevertheless, the point is well taken because faculty do participate in the process, i.e., the Steering Committee must coordinate the interview process, while other faculty must serve as interviewees.)

In response to question 3b about whether the availability of outside assistance would be an incentive to undertake the study, 3 participants did not respond, 1 said it would be welcome, 1 said critical, and 1 said it would be a disincentive in that it would abrogate a school's confidentiality.

In response to questions 4a and 4b regarding the felt need and impetus for faculty to undertake the self-study, 4 respondents said that the felt need would manifest primarily out of the

desire to improve unsatisfactory writing scores. One respondent predicted the opposite—that the impetus to do the study would arise only if it were *not* considered a quick fix for scores, but a way to truly help students. One participant did not respond.

In response to question 5a, all 6 respondents answered that the manual was user-friendly for middle and high school faculty. However, 2 respondents qualified their assessment by adding that the manual seemed user-friendly only after they had delved into it; therefore, they thought that transferring this perception of the manual to faculty would require either suitable presentation or a sincere willingness by faculty members to "digest" it. In response to question 5b, which solicited suggestions for improvement, 1 respondent requested that examples of how to incorporate study results into the School Consolidated Plan be included in the manual.

Three of the 6 respondents, each in answer to a different question, expressed the necessity for faculty "buy-in" of the study as a means of ameliorating the study's time commitment and minimizing the potential for a faculty inference that something was being "forced" on them.

Overall, participants found the manual to be exceptionally clear, well-organized, and user-friendly; nevertheless, it needs to be presented appropriately to faculty to minimize concerns based upon its size. The expected time commitment to conduct this study was the main concern of participants; nevertheless, participants felt that with facile presentation of the manual at the outset, the study might be willingly undertaken by middle and high school faculty.

## RESULTS

This section presents the findings from testing the *School Study of Writing Instruction,* mainly in its entirety in a school (Method I) and, as applicable, in sections by various educators (Method II). The study's value, need for facilitator help, and validity and reliability are considered. An unanticipated finding was the school's breadth in adapting and improving the instrument.

### Value

The pilot-test school (Method I, the full model) conducted the self-study smoothly with some immediate success. First, the instrument manual was made manageable with the facilitator's help, enabling the Steering Committee to assume the process with little assistance. Likewise, the participants in Method II initially judged the manual to be overwhelming based on its size, but felt that once absorbed, the manual instructions seemed exceptionally well-organized and clear.

Given the magnitude of the interviewing task (step 1), the facilitator at the pilot school had forecasted that the interviews were a hurdle that could have potentially hindered the remainder of the study; however, she reported that interviews were accomplished as planned and that the rest of the study proceeded easily. The Steering Committee had no difficulty choosing an interviewer. Conscientious about ensuring a cross-section of teacher interviewees, the Committee slightly modified the random selection process for teachers. Students were interviewed in pairs to heighten their comfort; pair interviewing did appear to work well with these elementary school students. On the other hand, participants in Method II who either pilot tested or reviewed the student interview section conjectured that interviewing middle or high school students in groups would reduce comfort, and thus recommended against it. However, their belief was not tested in practice as they had interviewed students only individually, while the research team's assumption had been tested earlier with favorable results. The research team had found during their site visits that multi-student interviews worked well with students at all grade levels.

For the most part, interviews of all role groups were conducted within the estimated time frame per interview, running slightly over with a few of the student interviewee pairs. The total time spent for interviewing was 14 hours, compared to the projected 12. The participants in Method II were also able to stay within the projected time frame per interview; however, they were especially concerned about the time needed to complete the total interviewing step.

The success of the rest of the study may be credited to the thorough preparation and planning done by the Steering Committee, despite that the manual contained no specific guidelines for how best to conduct planning. Steering Committee members prepared themselves before their second planning meeting by doing necessary reading in the manual. During the meeting, they laid extensive groundwork for the faculty rating session to come. Of all the steps involved in the study process, the research team predicted that the step of writing the report might present the greatest difficulty for the Committee. Yet Steering Committee members were able to write and compile report sections relatively easily, each person spending 2-3 hours instead of the estimated 1-2 (see Appendix B),

although they reported that it felt time-consuming to them. Having the forms on disk was helpful to the pilot school for typing both the interviews and report. Their report was much briefer than the sample provided in the manual, an observation explored in-depth later in the Validity and Reliability section.

The rating session, the culmination of the intensive data collection and compilation steps, was highly informative for the faculty, according to the facilitator. Faculty appeared to readily understand their task and the session progressed far beyond the Steering Committee's expectations. The Committee had expected the faculty to need the whole day to finish just one third of the ratings. To the contrary, not only did they finish *all* ratings within the original estimate of 2-3 hours, they went beyond the scope of the session by engaging in preliminary work on writing program priorities. The facilitator reported that it was especially rewarding that all faculty participated in discussion. It was observed that discrepant viewpoints requiring additional discussion typically arose from teachers who had not been interviewed, which demonstrates the importance of the faculty discussion and teachers' desire to have a stake in the study's outcomes. Finally, as urged in the manual, faculty targeted indicators based on their applicability to school goals, not just based on how low they were rated.

Further work on setting priorities and planning actions was assigned to the School Consolidated Planning Committee, with the intention that new actions would be incorporated into the next year's school plan. The school, as well as one of the participants in Method II, expressed the need for more specific guidance in this area; additional aids were subsequently provided to them and also included in the field-test version of the manual. The research team is unaware of the results of the priorities and actions step at this writing.

Perceived value of the self-study process was high among the faculty. Faculty indicated that they felt they had learned much but, at the same time, were not surprised with the resultant ratings and priorities. One faculty member said that the process validated what they already knew and gave them confidence in their judgments. Furthermore, the study gave them concrete direction for targeting weaknesses: as one teacher commented, "This is fixable. Get everyone a handbook and train them to use it" (*Kentucky Writing Portfolio: Writing Portfolio Development Teacher's Handbook* [2nd ed.], KDE, 1994a). The Steering Committee members rated the interviews as the most helpful part of the study, in contrast to the facilitator, who felt the faculty discussion was the most integral vehicle of the process. The principal was equally thrilled with the study's outcomes because of increased staff awareness of strengths and needs of the writing program, and especially because staff were able to conduct the study independently and efficiently.

The estimated time frame given in the manual overview for completing the study, "one month of focused attention," may need to be modified based on the pilot-test school's experience. The school completed the process through the rating session in 5 weeks, although it could have been done in 4 weeks had the rating session not been postponed due to a scheduling conflict. Yet this 5-week period covered progress only through the rating session (step 3); the priorities and planning (step 4) to be done by the School Consolidated Planning Committee was only beginning at the end

of 5 weeks. Thus the time estimate may need to be modified to "4-6 weeks through step 3" and a separate, perhaps even open-ended, estimate given for step 4. However, the study should not be extended over too long a period: the facilitator believes that although the pilot school's tight time frame created some pressure for the Steering Committee (their deadline was based both on the research team's exigency and the approach of Christmas break), it prevented the momentum and focus of the study from waning. While the participants in Method II felt that the time estimates and time frame were realistic, their review of sections of the instrument led them to raise a concern that the study as a whole would be a time-consuming process. The results of the field test will further hone the estimate of a realistic time frame for study completion.

**Value Added by Customization**

In the reflection of the research team, one gratifying outcome of this pilot test was the Steering Committee's practice of adapting the self-study process to suit its purposes for how to best conduct the study. Steering Committee members deftly customized the instrument in several ways as they progressed through the process, thereby improving it for future users as well as demonstrating the instrument's capacity for flexibility. Some of these adaptations were adoptions of either/or options presented in the manual, a few were direct contradictions to manual instructions, and some were original ideas of the Steering Committee and/or facilitator. These adaptations have been featured throughout this report; for clarity, they are enumerated in Table 1. Some were earmarked in time for inclusion in the field-test version of the instrument; others will show up as revisions to instructions in the final version if deemed fitting to other schools.

The significance of these adaptations is that they made the steps in the process and movement between steps more fluid and efficient. Six adaptations merit special mention. The first adaptation is the exemplary way in which the facilitator presented the manual to the Steering Committee in the first planning meeting, which had a positive ripple effect on the course of the study. Second were the Steering Committee planning meetings and their decision to preassign faculty small groups in advance of the rating session. Third, and particularly noteworthy, was the Committee's rejection of the choice to administer the teacher interview as a written survey, which has since been designated as a last-resort option for the field test. Fourth was placing a limit on the number of student interviewees per interview (two students at a time).[10] Fifth, an adaptation of significant consequence was condensing the teacher and student interviews into a composite form each. Its value for simplifying report writing was instantly apparent, generating an "aha, of course" revelation among the research team. And sixth was the immediate procession from small-group work to the display of results on the school profile (versus reserving this exercise for the Committee to complete later and distribute to faculty outside of a meeting setting); this had the effect of generating further faculty discussion as a large group and leading faculty into preliminary priorities-setting work.

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[10]In a practice interview, the interviewer and facilitator found it helpful for there to be two interviewers rather than one; however, as a practical matter, this approach was not adopted and the interviewer performed the remaining interviews herself. Also, this practice session yielded yet another potential adaptation for future consideration: the facilitator and interviewer found it easier to alternate asking and recording answers to each question, rather than each performing only one of the tasks throughout the interview.

Table 1: The Pilot School's Adaptations of the *School Study of Writing Instruction*

(Unless otherwise noted, it is implied that the Steering Committee is performing the action described.)

| |
|---|
| **Initial Planning:** |
| 1. (Principal) Garnered initial buy-in at a faculty meeting<br>2. (Principal) Nominated only teachers for the Steering Committee<br>3. Held two planning meetings<br>*4. (At the first planning meeting, the facilitator . . .) "Broke down" the manual for the Steering Committee in order to demonstrate the manageability of the process<br>5. (Prior to the second planning meeting, Committee members. . .) Read the manual and completed interviews<br>6. (At the second meeting) Read rating guide and discussed rating session procedures, as well as . . .(#7-11)<br>7. Preassigned small groups for the rating session and gave them the option of meeting prior to the session<br>8. Preappointed themselves (i.e., Committee members) as small group leaders<br>9. Set a goal and backup plan for the rating session<br>10. Allotted an entire workday for the rating session<br>11. Planned what types of indicators to target for improvement (the priorities) |
| **Interviews:** |
| 12. Chose one interviewer versus several so as to minimize interviewer training time<br>13. Dismissed the possibility of using higher grade level students as interviewers<br>14. Chose option of Steering Committee member (rather than interviewer) to interview the principal, but retained the interviewer for interviewing the district administrator<br>15. Modified the random selection process for teacher interviewees due to small school size<br>*16. (Interviewer) Interviewed teachers verbally only, dismissing the written survey option<br>17. Selected student interviewees on the day of their interviews<br>*18. (Interviewer) Interviewed students in pairs only<br>19. (Interviewer and facilitator) Alternated writing and recording tasks differently than stated in manual (applicable only to practice interview, in which there were two interviewers)<br>20. (Interviewer) Relied on tapes more than notes to write up the interviews<br>*21. (Steering Committee Chair) Condensed teacher and student interviews onto one form each |
| **Report:** |
| 22. (Steering Committee Chair) Acted as a resource person for other Committee members writing the report<br>23. (Steering Committee Chair) Typed the report instead of hiring someone<br>24. Did assigned report sections in pairs<br>25. Wrote a brief report<br>26. Did not use the "Other" spaces for recording additional information not elicited in interviews, as discussed later in the Validity and Reliability subsection |
| **Ratings:** |
| 27. (At the rating session) Immediately directed faculty to small groups<br>*28. Separated rating guide into sections for small groups<br>29. (Small groups) Read rating guide examples aloud<br>30. Transferred all ratings onto school profile on overhead, instead of having groups verbally share results<br>31. (Once the school profile was displayed, the faculty . . .) Continued discussion of ratings as a large group<br>32. (At the conclusion of the rating session, the faculty . . .) Engaged in informal priorities-setting |
| **Setting Priorities:** |
| 33. Chose the option of assigning completion of priorities setting to the School Consolidated Planning Committee instead of to the full faculty |

*Note: These adaptations were suggested in time for the field test.

**Role of the Observer/Facilitator**

A welcome finding of the pilot test was that the facilitator was needed by the Steering Committee much less than anticipated. However, her assistance when used was critical and its impact great. As already discussed, the facilitator's influence was most felt at the start of the process, when she physically "broke down" the manual for the Steering Committee, showing them which pages were guidelines and which merely forms. At the first planning meeting, she briefly reviewed the entire process and helped the Committee set dates for the steps, but quickly returned to in-depth planning for step 1 only. She did not want to tax Committee members by discussing the subsequent steps in detail because the steps would not have made sense without the context of step 1 (the completed interviews). Once the interviews were completed, and the Committee members had the compiled interviews in front of them at the second planning meeting, they had the context from which their subsequent planning made sense to them. As the facilitator said, "I knew that if they concentrated on just the interviews in the first meeting and got them out of the way, the rest would follow easily" (personal communication, March 8, 1999). The facilitator had predicted the effects of proper presentation and timing, and her predictions were borne out in practice. These techniques made the manual seem usable and the study process straightforward.

The second way in which the facilitator's assistance became critical was at successive important junctures, at the second planning meeting for example, where she gave suggestions for making the report brief. Feedback from the Steering Committee highlights these facets of the facilitator role, saying her initial "brief overview" and "hints on how to do [the study]" were the most valuable.

Committee members were dubious whether they could have conducted the study without the facilitator's help. But the facilitator has pointed out that after receiving her initial assistance, the Committee truly took responsibility for planning and doing the required work. For instance, she expected to possibly help with the report, even to the extent of writing the entire piece, thereby greatly overstepping the role in of observer/facilitator. She was quite pleased that this was not the case. In fact, ironically, the Steering Committee Chair was designated as the Committee's resource person for consultation during report writing because of her instrumental role in assembling the interviews, thus distancing the facilitator's presence slightly. As it happened, neither the facilitator nor the Chair was consulted for help during report writing. These events demonstrate the Committee's initiative and assumption of ownership in the process. The facilitator felt that the Committee's initiative in writing and compiling the report and in planning and leading the rating session was a hallmark of the study's success.

The facilitator assumed other roles besides initiator and intermittent guide. She was a consultant, a trainer (of the interviewer), one of the small group leaders (during the rating session, for a logistical reason), and a reviewer (of school profile and priority-setting results). In her own characterization, she was an observer, referring to her limited role once the Steering Committee assumed responsibility for activities in the process and to her abstinence from intervening whenever

she witnessed an unproductive activity. In summary, she seems to have been a genuine facilitator—initiating the process and later stepping in only when needed .

In Method II, respondents were mixed in their projection about whether outside assistance would be an incentive to schools to undertake the study. Of 6 possible respondents,1 said outside assistance would be welcome, 1 said critical, and 1 said such assistance would be a disincentive; 3 respondents did not answer this question.

**Validity and Reliability**

The pilot-test school was gracious in abridging its privilege of confidentiality by providing a copy of their interviews, report, and school profile to the project team. The report's brevity was immediately striking, each report topic response being one or two lines long. At first glance, the responses seemed to capture the general essence of the interview data, but closer reading left a sense of gaps in the report. Also, some responses seemed repetitive, as if the writers had relied on stock answers. These observations led to a qualitative reliability examination, in which a member of the research team used the interview data to prepare a separate report, which confirmed that information was missing under some report topics. The comparison revealed that report topic responses were sometimes accurate, but largely incomplete. A few responses even directly contradicted the interview data. In its entirety, the report seemed too concise. The brevity of the report was especially puzzling in light of the fact that a sample report had been provided that contained longer responses to report topics.

Reasons for the disparities between the school's report and the externally prepared version were explored by the team. The first possible reason was pinpointed several times by various individuals. The facilitator reported that the Steering Committee had found the "Table of report sections and data" (Appendix D) cumbersome to use in the process of transposing the interview data to the report. Also, on their feedback forms, Steering Committee members specifically suggested that the analogous teacher and student questions be arranged more parallel to each other in sequence in their respective interviews. The evaluator confirmed this difficulty while trying to use it when conducting the reliability examination.

Thus, it is felt that the report's low degree of *interobserver* or *interrater reliability* (i.e., lack of agreement between the school's and the evaluator's reports) originated partly from an internal validity problem in the instrument (a problem with the instrument itself such that the dependent variable—in this case, the writing program—is not being accurately measured). The "Table of report sections and data" is identified as such an internal validity concern in the *School Study* instrument, impeding the report writers from accurately describing the writing program in their report. The central drawback of the table is that it is too vague. It does not specify in enough detail the data reference items (i.e., the interview questions) that correspond to particular report topics, sometimes referring the report writer to entire interviews just to address one topic. Thus in effect, the connection between X and Y is a non sequitur. This want for clarity forces an unconscious decision upon the report writer: either wade repeatedly through entire interviews to find the questions

relevant to various report topics, or take a general panoramic view of the data. The former choice, although it may generate a fuller report, makes report writing unwieldy. The latter is perhaps more pragmatic; hence, the vague table may have contributed to the vague, incomplete report.

A second possible reason for the reliability problem stems from another internal instrumentation threat to validity—the report-writing instructions. The facilitator can be credited with making the study as facile as possible for the Steering Committee. Knowing that the school had only a short amount of time to complete the study and recognizing the time involved in report writing as a potential impediment to the study's ultimate success, she instructed the Steering Committee to keep the report brief. The instructions in the manual also encourage brevity. Citing Fuller's (1969) concerns theory, later developers of this theory list time demands as a potential concern for teachers when they approach a new education innovation (Hall, George, & Rutherford, 1979, p.3; Hall & Hord, 1987, pp. 57, 60). Probably the more efficient a project is, given teachers' limited time, the greater the benefit and higher the value it holds for teachers. Thus in the interest of saving time, it may be wise to write a brief report; but the question remains as to how brief a report should be. The balance between brevity and accuracy of the report is explored further in the Conclusions and Recommendations section of this report.

Additional aspects of the *School Study* instrument likely contributed to awkward data transposition (i.e., internal invalidity) and hence, forced brevity in the school's report (i.e., unreliability in comparison to the evaluator's report). Only two of them are mentioned here as the third and fourth concerns with the instrument. The third concern is an absence of interview questions on various role group interview forms. There were a few instances in which relevant interview questions necessary for thoroughly answering an indicated report topic did not exist in a relevant role group's interview. For instance, although a report topic (i.e., indicator) exists concerning the movement of portfolios between grade levels, both the student and teacher interview forms lacked a question about it. This means that the report topic could be answered only if some of the student or teacher interviewees happened to make a relevant comment about it in the course of answering other interview questions. The absence of necessary questions arose out of an iterative design process, in that the manual's design came out of a series of discoveries by the research team which required successive revisions of previous components. More specifically, interview questions were missing because when the interview protocols were first written and used, report topics related to them did not yet exist. Only in the process of interviewing more students, teachers, etc., in the indicator discovery phase, did new indicators emerge. While the new indicators were added as report topics, the task of creating new interview questions to correlate to them was overlooked.

The fourth concern is report topics that may be redundant or too general. Seemingly redundant report topics may have confused the report writers, causing them to write less for some topics because they considered them repetitious of previous ones. Yet the report topics are not redundant in reality, for they represent independently researched and established indicators with different meanings. Therefore it would be inappropriate to substantially alter them: only modest revisions in the wording of a few report topics should be required to achieve the desired clarity.

The fifth and sixth possible sources for any unreliability between the school's and the evaluator's reports arise from the presence of human involvement in the study process, not from a concern with the instrument itself. The fifth concern is omission of relevant interview data in the school's report, based on the report writers' exercise of judgment of what and what not to include. By contrast, the evaluator included much more interview data in her report. Also, the research team was puzzled that the report writers had not used the "Other" spaces intended for them to record their own knowledge of information not elicited in the interviews. A possible explanation for these omissions is that if the faculty members possessed collective tacit and contextual knowledge, then a lengthier, more developed report would have been unnecessary. Report writers may have relied on the common knowledge possessed by the faculty, and thus knew what information did and did not need to be included. Another explanation is that, according to the facilitator's observations, some data was intentionally omitted to avoid pinpointing specific individuals as sources of problems with the writing program. In contrast, the evaluator—being removed from the school, not knowing any of the participants, and not having an audience for her report—possessed no reason for masking negative information. In light of these explanations for missing data, gaps in the report may not be of paramount concern because some important information, although omitted in writing, was already commonly understood by the readers and users of the report.

Sixth, there were a few places in the school's report where responses seemed to contradict the interview data. The facilitator attributed these incongruities also to a desire by the report writers to avoid pinpointing certain individuals as sources of writing program problems. Again, this is unreliability that arises from human involvement in a study, i.e., their use of the instrument, not from the instrument itself.

A reliability and validity evaluation was not conducted of the ratings as was done for the report, although the pilot school had submitted a copy of their school profile. There are a few reasons for this. Since the rating documents are partly dependent on the report, several problems in data transposition to the ratings could be traced to problems in the report. Thus the report was deemed to be a more foundational document for beginning investigation and discovery. Indeed, as delineated above, examining the report yielded several significant insights. Second, the ratings are based on a combination of the report and faculty discussion: since the faculty rating session had not been recorded, it would have been difficult to have evaluated the ratings reliably. Third, since much of the value of the self-study is derived from its being an internal project conducted by the stakeholders, it would have been somewhat meaningless to have imposed an external evaluation on the school's findings: it might have been tantamount to questioning the collective beliefs and experiences of the faculty, as shared in their discussion at the rating session.

Nevertheless, some cursory observations were made about the ratings. The facilitator, who was somewhat familiar with the school and faculty from previous work-related experiences as well as the current project, reported her belief that overall, the ratings accurately reflected the school's writing program. When following up with the school sometime after the rating session, she did question two of the ratings (out of 34), however. A Steering Committee member justified both of

them with evidence; the facilitator was satisfied, but reported that she still slightly disagreed with one of the ratings.

Just as instrumentation problems were found relative to the report, a weakness was also discovered in the rating section of the *School Study* instrument which affected the validity of data transposition. A few of the report topics (i.e., indicators) appearing on the report form were omitted from the rating form and school profile form. Some of these "omissions" were the result of collapsing indicators which had originally been written as separate indicators on the report form; so while they were present on the subsequent forms, they were just not conspicuous. Some indicators were late additions to the report form and mistakenly not added to the rating forms also (the same problem discussed earlier regarding a lack of some relevant interview questions). These omissions from the rating forms were discovered by the pilot test school in the course of their rating session.

To summarize, gaps in the school's report arose mainly from a few threats to validity in the *School Study of Writing Instruction* manual, not from an inability on the part of participants to use the instrument effectively. One such instrumentation threat was the configuration of the "Table of report sections and data." Another was the nature of the instructions given to the report writers, both those written in the manual and stated verbally by the facilitator to be "brief." Still another was the omission of indicators on the rating forms. Other minor problems in the instrument were also threats to validity that contributed to some unreliability in the school's report. Regardless of the specific error in the instrument, the lack of direct connections between X and Y is the underlying problem that caused confusion in the process of transposing the data from the interviews to the report, and from the report to other forms. All of these weaknesses are correctable; they are listed in Table 2, ordered by their sequence in the self-study process. The *School Study* manual was presented to the school as a pilot test version, not in final form; therefore revisions to the manual were expected and welcomed for the purpose of refining it for future schools.

Some threats to validity did not emanate from instrument weaknesses though, but from participants' use of the instrument. Whenever human interviewers, observers, or raters are employed in a study, reliability is a concern (Huck et al., 1974). It is unavoidable and cannot be eliminated altogether. An example of this phenomenon was the report writers' assumption that some of the data was already collectively understood by report users, and therefore, unnecessary to record. Another example was their effort to write in such a way—by omitting or modifying interview responses—that did not negatively target specific individuals. The presence of a degree of unreliability does not seriously diminish the power of the self-study however. Rather, the participation of so many stakeholders is one of the self-study's strengths. Practitioners should merely be aware that such a compromise exists.

Table 2: Weaknesses in the *School Study of Writing Instruction*

| Weakness | Specific Location/Description |
|---|---|
| **Interviews:** | |
| 1. Errors in the numbering sequence of interview questions<br>2. Lack of interview questions that would be helpful for answering some report topics | 1. District administrator interview - #11; principal interview - #8, 21, 22<br>2. Various interview forms require an additional question to address certain report topics:<br>a. Teacher and principal interview forms - (require a question about . . .) professional development in writing instruction for content areas (to address report topic 2D)<br>b. Teacher and principal forms - structured strategic collaboration in professional development (to address report topic 2H)<br>c. Student and teacher - how portfolios travel between grade levels (3A,B; 9C)<br>d. Teacher - how often students write (3B; 9A,B,D)<br>e. Teacher - the percentage of specifically portfolio-intended assignments (9A)<br>f. Student - conferencing with teachers (10D)<br>g. Student - whether they get writing ideas from reading (14A)<br>h. Student - how the mechanics of writing are taught (14B) |
| **Report:** | |
| 3. Vague "Table of report sections and data" | 3. Section 2 in the manual: compare Appendixes D (original table) and H (revised) in this report. |
| 4. Report writing instructions | 4. Section 3 in the manual: see Conclusions and Recommendations in this report for suggestions. |
| 5. Report topic headings that use either unclear or influential wording | 5. 2, 2D; 4; 7; 9A,D; 15; 16 |
| 6. Combination of the spaces for district administrator and principal perspectives into one space, "Administrator perspective," instead of keeping them separate | 6. Entire report form in Section 2 of the manual |
| 7. No provision of space for some relevant role groups under some report topics, though relevant questions exist in their interviews | 7. 1A,B; 2A,B,D; 3A,B; 9A,C,D,E; 10A |
| 8. A report topic as currently worded that seems to repeat another which is better defined | 8. 7 seems to repeat 9A-E. |
| 9. Other report topics that seem redundant | 9. 2A-B thematically embedded in 1A-B; 11B thematically embedded in 13A |
| 10. A report topic that is too general—as currently worded, calls for conclusion of entire report | 10. 16 |
| 11. Report topics structured differently than corresponding questions in interviews | 11. 2A-D |
| **Ratings:** | |
| 12. Omission of indicators from the rating guide, rating form, and school profile form | 12. 2H; 3A,B; 9D,E |



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## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, positive conclusions are drawn about the self-study process. The faculty in the full model demonstrated that it was valuable to them, mainly due to their having assumed ownership of the steps in the process. The time commitment required to undertake the study was an issue of concern, although this was mitigated somewhat by the school's ability to adapt the instrument to suit their needs. The facilitator's role was deemed crucial at critical junctures; yet creative recommendations for decreasing reliance on external facilitators are proposed. Validity and reliability are considered in interaction with perceived value of the study.

### Value

In conclusion, the *School Study of Writing Instruction* has high and immediate utility for schools. With the possible exception of step 2, writing the report, it is a palatable, straightforward process for participants. Especially with a self-study, it is promising that a program of the school encompassing a large number of factors can be measured rigorously in a short amount of time; thus it appears to be a comparatively parsimonious process. Also, the faculty reported that they felt the study was valuable and expressed an appreciation for its data-based approach. Nevertheless, the Steering Committee members in Method I and the participants in Method II expressed concern about the time involved to complete the study.

The facilitator attributed the study's success to two manifestations of the faculty's sense of ownership of the study. First, the Steering Committee assumed ownership of the tasks involved, particularly writing the report and leading the rating session. They immersed themselves in the process and were self-guided much of the time. That they chose to conduct the principal interview themselves, handled a considerable amount of planning, wrote the report unaided, and planned extensively before the rating session demonstrates their interest in the study's outcomes.

Second, the faculty-at-large also assumed ownership of the process principally by means of extensive discussion. The facilitator declared that the opportunities for discussion were by far the most valuable aspect of the study—both for garnering initial buy-in and giving teachers a stake in analysis and planning in the rating session. Both the small- and large-group forums in the rating session contributed to session outcomes. What was salient about the discussions was that they drew full participation and were productively targeted, according to the facilitator. An intriguing note on the tenor of these sessions is that faculty examined indicators at which they were high-performing as well as low-performing; so the study may be useful for illustrating strengths as well as weaknesses of a writing program, for allowing staff to take some pride in their strengths, even if no actions are to be taken in regards to them. Another factor that seems to have cemented the sense of ownership felt by faculty is that they were neither forced to do the study nor accountable to an outside authority for its outcome. Faculty were regularly reminded, including at the start of the rating session, that their analyses were exclusively for in-school use, which the facilitator asserts was important to them. In sum, as the research team had suspected early in the project's development, the "self" aspect of the study was a cardinal asset to this needs assessment.

Other factors likely affected the actual and perceived value of the study. Third was the data-based approach. The faculty liked seeing tangible results displayed in a tangible product such as the school profile. One faculty member commented that it validated the worth of their perceptions, imbuing them with the stroke of authenticity. Also, it lent organization and cohesion to the planning process, making obstacles seem solvable because they were being solved collectively.

A fourth factor that perhaps impacted the perceived value of the study was the stipend. It is assumed, but not known, that the stipend was part of the incentive for the school to pilot test the instrument.

A fifth factor that likely impacted perceived value was the time required to complete the study. The time commitment had two aspects to it. While the study was parsimonious and almost effortless for the faculty in general, planning and completing it involved a considerable time commitment on the part of the Steering Committee. That the rating session flowed so well beyond expectations is a testament to the extensive planning and preparation done by the Committee. As described earlier, they were exceptionally prepared at every step in the process, having done preparatory reading; copied and distributed important documents; and prestructured the rating session and set goals for it, all in addition to compiling the data and writing the report. Their experience shows that for the study to succeed, the Steering Committee must be willing to take charge of it and devote some time to it; a disjointed, half-hearted attempt by the Committee probably would not work.

It was reported that the rating session analysis was successful, and that faculty members were pleased with the results. The fact that recommended priorities are slated for use in writing the school plan shows the process to have been beneficial for the short term. However, the manageability and value of the study past the rating session cannot be assessed yet because step 4 (finalizing priorities and planning and implementing new actions) had only begun at the time of this writing. The ultimate test of the study's value is the feat of translating analyses and priorities into workable actions. It is predicted that in the case of the pilot school, the planning phase will realize eventual gains for the long term because of the enthusiasm expressed by faculty and the assignment of this phase to a committee at the conclusion of the rating session. One of the participants in Method II recommended that schools begin the self-study in the spring, so that the summer could be used for tailoring the school plan for the upcoming year and for participating in professional development relevant to the writing program.

Several participants in Method II predicted that faculty in middle and high schools would be interested in undertaking the study only in the event of declining test scores, not because of a general motivation to improve the writing program and student writing for their own sake. This commentary underscores the evidence that the self-study may need to be "marketed" to teachers. Data indicate that teachers may "buy into" it only after some exposure to it—either by hearing a clear presentation of the manual in a Steering Committee meeting or by participating in the faculty rating session. Once the "buy-in" is achieved, however, the study's inherent value is readily appreciated, perhaps irrespective of its immediate impact on scores.

**Recommendation 1.** Incorporate guidelines in the manual that describe the importance of providing an adequate rationale for conducting the *School Study* to the faculty, i.e., the first step in "marketing" the process. Also include guidelines for the next step: clearly and concisely presenting the *School Study* manual to the Steering Committee.

**Recommendation 2.** Include a suggestion that schools undertake the study in the spring, which is closer to the time that the school plan is written for the following school year.

**Recommendation 3.** Include guidelines in the manual that suggest at least two planning meetings and specify a general outline for them. Furthermore, the time frame should perhaps be lengthened to "4-6 weeks through step 3" and a separate time frame proposed just for step 4.

**Recommendation 4.** Include guidelines that encourage administrators to consider ways of supporting Steering Committee members with release time and/or stipends to conduct the study (the stipend of $1,500 provided by the Kentucky Department of Education [KDE] was intended only for schools which participated in the pilot and field tests).

**Recommendation 5.** Revise guidelines to address the possibility of hiring interviewers and further emphasize the benefit of hiring typists. Schools have to ensure that interviewers are not well-known to the teacher and student interviewees, which most likely requires looking outside the school for them. In the pilot-test school, the interviewer chosen was an ideal choice because (1) she was already a paid staff member who could easily complete her task during working hours since she did not have a regular classroom and (2) she was new and thus relatively unknown to the teachers and students. These propitious circumstances may be difficult to replicate. In regards to typing, the Steering Committee Chair had typed both the interviews and report, even though the manual suggestion is to consider hiring others, such as paraprofessional staff. In hindsight, she suggested that hiring someone for these tasks would have been a better option. Of course, there is the possibility that some individuals may be willing to serve as interviewer or typist on a volunteer basis.

**Value Added by Customization**

The school added value to the study by customizing the *School Study* instrument protocol to suit its purposes for completing the study. That the school was able to customize it easily but still remain within the confines of the study's purpose is advantageous for the survival of the instrument in future schools—it is malleable yet powerful. Ideally, the protocol would be flexible because it will be new and perhaps foreign to each school that undertakes it; if the study were regimented such that it had to be conducted exactly as written, it would be more difficult to implement widely. In their research on educational innovation, Berman and McLaughlin (1975) used the term *mutual adaptation* to describe the optimum pattern for implementing a new innovation (Hord, 1987, p.14). In mutual adaptation, an innovation and the school setting are adjusted to fit each other. Furthermore, unlike other patterns of innovation implementation that target the student and ignore the teacher, mutual adaptation works because it recognizes the teacher as "an irreducible middle

component in implementation" (Hord, 1987, p. 15). This understanding reinforces the importance of teachers' sense of ownership in planning and analyzing the writing program.

A review of the adaptations in Table 2 in the Results section reveals that many revolve around time and efficiency, although some are clearly more related to quality control of the study. In all, these "shortcuts" made the progression between steps faster and smoother, yet they required that the Steering Committee invest more time in planning and preparations. Also, a few were either neutral or perhaps counterproductive.

**Recommendation 6.** Adopt adaptations listed in Table 2 as deemed useful and incorporate them into the *School Study* manual.

**Role of the Observer/Facilitator**

Although initially expected only to observe the pilot test, the observer/facilitator emerged predominantly as a facilitator, which ultimately contributed a great deal of additional knowledge to pilot-test findings. The two quintessential roles assumed by the facilitator were initiator of the study process and director at subsequent critical junctures. The research team predicted that the facilitator would be most needed for training interviewers and leading the report writing. In fact, she spent only minimal time training interviewers and none at all doing the latter. These findings undergird the viability of schools conducting the study in the future with little or no assistance.

Nonetheless, although the Steering Committee assumed responsibility for a great deal of the planning and work, it is evident that they relied on the facilitator's direction at critical junctures. Also, they expressed doubt in their ability to have completed the study without her. Furthermore, as the facilitator's role extended only through the rating session and some preliminary priority-setting, it is not known how successful the priorities-finalization and actions-planning activities were for the School Consolidated Planning Committee. Perhaps facilitator guidance would be useful for these tasks as well.

In sum, the degree of need for facilitation remains unclear for future implementation. The pilot-test facilitator felt that a facilitator should be geographically close to the school to be available fairly constantly, but not necessarily present during the entire process. It is not feasible for the Kentucky Regional Writing Consultants to continue to act as facilitators beyond the pilot and field tests because there are only eight statewide.

**Recommendation 7.** To further elucidate the need for a facilitator, the field test is currently being employed at two conditions of facilitation—half with a facilitator and half with only a phone contact person. The collaborative research team hopes to discover how well the latter, independent group of schools manages without a full-fledged facilitator.

**Recommendation 8.** As it is predicted that schools will either want or require some degree of assistance, it is recommended that external facilitators be identified, trained, and made available to desiring schools in the fall of 1999 as it is fiscally viable.

**Recommendation 9.** Another way of providing facilitator assistance may also be explored. The pilot-school facilitator believed that the possibility of effective in-school facilitators is feasible. She expressed that if one faculty member is thoroughly trained in the *School Study* process, a school can carry it out with little to no assistance. That the Steering Committee Chair in the pilot-test school was nominated as a quasi-facilitator for a part of the process, and is a member of the School Consolidated Planning Committee that will plan the new actions, undergirds the possibility of strong teacher leaders acting as facilitators. In-school facilitators would need to be capable of engineering the crucial steps, such as effectively outlining the manual for the Steering Committee, training interviewers, and guiding the report writing and rating session. The facilitator's proposal for training teacher leaders is to hold a region-wide meeting for Steering Committee members from various schools.

**Recommendation 10.** The pilot-school facilitator also proposed conducting the rating sessions of several schools contemporaneously at a central site, led by trained in-house facilitators and overseen by district, regional, or state staff. Perhaps schools could undertake the earlier and later steps in the process with only phone contact from outside staff.

**Recommendation 11.** The central issue for consideration in deploying facilitators is cost. The amount and type of facilitator assistance offered to schools will determine a large portion of the cost of implementing the self-study. Schools are permitted to use monies for consolidated planning to implement such a program: helping schools identify these funds is a task for the regions and KDE. Offering regional and state assistance in larger forums such as the region-wide meetings discussed previously will reduce the cost. Yet doing so may also transfer cost to schools as they support training of teachers as facilitators.

**Recommendation 12.** The research team has considered separating the manual into two volumes—one containing the instructions and the other just the forms.

As indicated earlier, the presentation of the manual absent the guidance of an outside facilitator became a central issue for consideration when the research team perceived how valuable the facilitator's presentation was for the pilot-school Steering Committee in Method I. The concern is that the size of the manual may immediately alienate faculty, either tempering enthusiasm for undertaking the study or diminishing the quality of study outcomes. It is noteworthy that the participants in this study who did not have the benefit of a facilitator, those in Method II, unanimously raised a concern about the magnitude of the study, based on the manual's size. One did qualify her concern by stating that schools' willingness would depend on quality presentation of the manual. Whereas participants who did have the benefit of a facilitator, Steering Committee members in Method I, appraised their facilitator's initial presentation of the manual as the greatest benefit of her assistance, and doubted their ability to conduct the study without her. Thus for schools

that might not have facilitators in the future, it is necessary to make the *School Study* appealing to them as a stand-alone product. If securing and deploying facilitators as described in recommendations 8 and 9 proves to be difficult for schools in the future, modifying the manual is a tangible way in which the threat of its large appearance may be minimized.

The preceding discussion has centered on the *need* for a facilitator. Yet a participant in Method II offered a perspective on the *desire* of schools to have a facilitator. In her estimation, the presence of a facilitator would infringe on the confidentiality of the study and thus possibly mitigate a school's willingness to undertake it. The research team believes that schools will value the confidentiality of this study, not out of a desire to keep results secret from individuals at random, but based on the reassurance that their results are not going to be "measured" by an outside entity such as the Kentucky Department of Education, to which they are frequently accountable. The facilitator asserted that this aspect of confidentiality was indeed important to the pilot-test school. In sum, an individual facilitator would probably not pose a threat to a school's sense of confidentiality. Yet the above participant's perspective is useful nonetheless, reinforcing the importance of faculty ownership in school programs. It underscores the fact that facilitators should vigilantly refrain from controlling or criticizing the study process of a school, which might undermine a faculty's sense of ownership. Instead, they should consider themselves "helpful guests."

**Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability are requisite issues for consideration whenever a new instrument is tested (Huck et al., 1974). In the course of performing a reliability test, an internal validity threat was identified in relation to the "Table of report sections and data" significant enough to warrant revision. Other minor problems in various components of the instrument were identified as well. These weaknesses concerned accurate data transposition through the pipeline from the interviews to the report, ratings form, and school profile.

To correct one of these threats to validity, the "Table of report sections and data" was reconfigured after the pilot test to more specifically link each report topic with its corresponding interview questions (or *data reference items*). Three members of the collaborative research team undertook the task individually and then compared their tables. However, each generated a different table, thus presenting a new difficulty. The issue was resolved for the field test by removing the original table altogether and choosing not to replace it with one of the new tables. The arguments for removing the table were that (1) responses to interview questions do not bear a linear relationship to specific report topics (hence the research team's difficulty in trying to create a uniform table among themselves) and (2) the desired global focus of the report could be better attained by leaving open the field of possible data reference items for the writers to choose from.

**Recommendation 13.** Yet despite the difficulty of creating a new "Table of report sections and data," it is recommended that one of the three new tables be inserted in the final version of the *School Study of Writing Instruction* (see Appendix H). The research team will await the outcome of the field-test schools' experience before deciding whether to eliminate or include it. This study requests teachers with limited time to draw conclusions from concrete data instead of their

conventional wisdom. Therefore, every step should be as clear and "mechanized" as possible so that the process feels fluid to the participants. Shuffling through numerous interviews with no specific direction may overload report writers, paradoxically tunneling them into a narrow focus in which they can only manage to skim conspicuous aspects of the interviews. Therefore, the argument for including a new "Table of report sections and data" reflects the original intent for having a table—to help report writers identify relevant data reference items so that they write complete, multifaceted report topic responses.

It is true that the interview questions (data reference items) are not neatly discrete or exclusive in their relevance to different report topics. However, further reflection on one of the newer tables reveals that data items do bear a discernible linear relationship to the topics—it just happens to be a *multilinear* one. That is, data generated by one interview question may relate to several report topics. Therefore, it is possible to specify the data reference items. Since it is possible, it may also be preferable: a report writer's decision to ignore cued data is probably easier to make than the decision to include data that are not cued and have to be hunted. In sum, specifying as many data items as possible *beforehand* for report writers will likely enhance their efficiency by minimizing data-hunting time, and probably help them create a more global representation of their school's writing program than if they had no table.

**Recommendation 14.** If the new table is adopted in the final instrument, written and verbal guidelines for writing the report should be modified accordingly. The brevity of the pilot school's report was perhaps as much owing to the instructions given in the manual and by the facilitator as it was to the vagueness of the original table. The recommendations given in the manual are to record the "gist" of report topics using the "greatest brevity." In retrospect, these recommendations are more fitting for note-taking while reading the interviews than for report writing.

Ideally, instructions would provide insight about how to incorporate detail meaningfully, while keeping the report topic responses relatively brief (i.e., short paragraphs). An excerpt from the revised instructions might read something like the following:

> First, read all the interviews. As you read, make notes in the margins to capture the gist of each question. To write the report, you will have two types of questions to consider. The first are the interview questions specified as "data reference items" in the "Table of report sections and data." Depending on how interviewees respond to questions, some will be directly related to the report topic you are answering; others will be indirectly related, if at all. Do not belabor the relevance of every interview question: if one seems irrelevant, it probably is, so skip it and move on to the next one. Also, you will notice that certain interview questions appear more than once in the data column of the table; this is because most questions address more than one report topic.
>
> The second type of interview questions you will consider are those ***not*** specified in the "Table of report sections and data." The reason they are not indicated is because they are unprompted and unanticipated by the questions, and therefore their relevance is unpredictable. For example, question #47 in the teacher interview asks about community involvement. If a teacher answers something like,

> "I wouldn't have as much community involvement as I do if it weren't for such strong district support," then this item has bearing on the district support report topic as well as on the community involvement report topic. It was not called for in the question, but came through in the answer. The way to incorporate this second type of question into your report is by thoroughly reading the interviews. Hopefully, significant comments will jump out at you such that you will remember to go back and find them when you want them.
>
> By considering several questions from various interviews for each report topic, you are making your report illustrative and comprehensive, and you are drawing out the differences in perspective of the role groups. As you attempt to answer each report topic in turn, make notes on scratch paper about what each role group says. Then look for consistencies, inconsistencies, and points of high importance or interest, in their statements. Blend them into a narrative description of a few to several sentences long. Once you're pleased with it, transfer your description to a clean report form. Your narratives should be descriptive, including important detail and excluding extraneous detail. A good rule of thumb is to be relatively brief, but not too brief or general (unless you are trying to avoid singling out individuals as sources of problems, in which case you should describe your observations in general terms).

Finally, an additional two hours should be added to the original estimated time for report writing (1-2 hours per person). Although the teachers estimated that this task took them 2-3 hours individually, they made general statements that it felt like quite a bit of time, leading the facilitator to think that the accurate estimates were probably larger than that. (This change should be made in the "Time and Task Summary" in the overview as well as in the text of manual guidelines.)

**Recommendation 15.** Thus far, adaptations to the *School Study of Writing Instruction* have been considered in Table 1, and revisions to parts of the instrument such as the "Table of report sections and data" have been considered in Table 2. These adaptations and revisions are briefly noted again, along with other proposed revisions to the instrument, in Table 3. It is recommended that all those deemed useful be adopted for revision to the *School Study of Writing Instruction* manual and a final version of the manual be produced (AEL, 1997a).

**Extended Discussion on Validity and Reliability**

Aside from whether or not a revised table and instructions can produce a more comprehensive report, the utility of such a report should be considered. How one views the report's function, in tandem with desired outcomes for the study, determines the report's utility or value.

If its value stems preeminently from its service as a springboard to faculty discussion, rather than from the representativeness of its content, then a brief report that highlights a few important characteristics of a writing program should be sufficient. It should also be sufficient if it can be assumed that faculty share a certain amount of contextual knowledge; thus a degree of precision in data translation can be sacrificed responsibly. Also, a brief report may be necessary given teachers' limited amount of time. The facilitator appraised the faculty discussion as a most valuable agent to the study's success. Thus it would be counterproductive to impede progress to this milestone by

Table 3: Proposed Revisions to the *School Study of Writing Instruction*

| |
|---|
| **Overview:** |
| 1. Perhaps change time frame to longer than one month and create a separate time frame for step 4<br>2. Recommend that schools start the study in the spring<br>3. (In the Time and Task Summary) Allot more total time for the interviewing step, including time to type compilations of the teacher and student interviews<br>4. (In the Time and Task Summary) Allot more time per individual for the report step, including time to type the report<br>5. (In the Time and Task Summary) Allot time for two Steering Committee initial planning meetings |
| **Initial Planning:** |
| 6. Incorporate a section of guidelines in the manual for conducting two initial planning meetings; specify the content to cover at each meeting and the material to read in preparation for each<br>7. Adopt all adaptations in Table 1 as considered helpful and appropriate |
| **Interviews:** |
| 8. Adopt all adaptations in Table 1 as considered helpful and appropriate<br>9. Make corrections to weaknesses listed in Table 2, especially the errors in numbering sequence<br>*10. If feasible, select two interviewers instead of one, who then conduct each interview together<br>*11. Interview students in groups no larger than pairs |
| **Report:** |
| 12. Adopt all adaptations in Table 1 as considered helpful and appropriate<br>13. Make corrections to weaknesses listed in Table 2, especially to the "Table of report sections and data" and the report writing instructions<br>*14. If a new "Table of report sections and data" cannot be created, remove the table<br>15. Remove instructions to sort interview forms before writing the report (this activity having been made unnecessary by the creation of a "composite" form for the teacher and student interviews) |
| **Ratings:** |
| 16. Adopt all adaptations in Table 1 as considered helpful and appropriate<br>17. Make corrections to weaknesses listed in Table 2, especially the omission of indicators in the rating guide, rating form, and school profile |
| **Priorities:** |
| 18. Adopt all adaptations in Table 1 as considered helpful and appropriate<br>*19. Provide more specific guidance in the manual about incorporating new actions into the School Consolidated Plan, such as a guide (Impact Check) and sample (Action Plan) |
| **Other Minor Revisions:** |
| 20. On the report form, the letters of report topics "1A" and "1B" should be capitalized<br>21. In the ratings section, change the wording of "small group facilitator" to "small group leader"<br>22. Also in the ratings section, fit the computer-generated average school profiles on one page like the school profile to be used by the school, allowing for better visual comparison |

*Note: These changes were suggested in time for the field test.

overemphasizing the report. It may even be necessary for deflecting attention from particular individuals as sources of problems in the writing program, which would only alienate them from the process and school collegiality in general. In this "springboard" conception, the report may have only limited value by itself, but premium value by virtue of its association to faculty discussion.

In the alternative conception of the report's function, it is the pivotal valve in a data-driven process. It is the valve between the raw data (interviews) and conclusions (rating form and school profile, followed by the priorities and new actions). The school profile, the visual representation of the rating form, is designed to be a skeletal outline. By contrast, the report should be fuller; it should reflect the full breadth of understanding about the writing program and stimulate discussion among the faculty. It needs to be serviceable for well-directed discussion, not just discussion per se. The clearer the report topics are elucidated, the clearer are the points of departure in discussion. Especially in larger schools, a detailed report would be more meaningful and useful for the rating session because the body of data to be analyzed would usually be larger than average and the faculty body that needs to absorb it would be larger as well—the report writers could not as easily rely on the assumption of collective tacit knowledge among faculty. Also important, the committee that plans new directions for the writing program at the conclusion of the study needs a report with some detail to consult in order to make sound decisions. For these reasons, the report should be somewhat specific and comprehensive.

Emphasis on this approach does not at all diminish the import of teachers' wealth of tacit, contextual knowledge, which is given ample voice in the "other" spaces of the report and through faculty discussion. In this approach, however, as opposed to the springboard conception, it is important that this knowledge be recorded in the report. The data-driven approach of the school study is expressly designed to explore beyond the conventional assumptions held by some teachers, in order to unearth and discard false beliefs yet give credence to those that are true. Recall that much of the consensus-building time spent during the faculty discussion was due to differences with conclusions in the report that non-interviewed teachers had voiced. The presence of supporting detail in the report should help the flow of faculty discussions. Faculty themselves, in both the rating session and Steering Committee feedback, expressed a high regard for this data-based approach, i.e., "This verified what we knew and gave us data to work with."

The discourse on validity and reliability thus far in this report has concentrated specifically on the unreliability of the school's report and how that was influenced by internal validity weaknesses in parts of the *School Study of Writing Instruction* instrument. This examination represents just one narrow aspect of the validity and reliability at issue. Taking a wider perspective as well, the research team has considered the validity and reliability of the *School Study of Writing Instruction* as an overall process. Namely, the research team has posed two questions. One, has the independent variable (the *School Study*) caused an effect in the dependent variable (the writing program)? Two, can other schools also conduct the *School Study of Writing Instruction* with a similar measure of success? These are internal validity and reliability questions, respectively, but asked in a broader context than those questions which dealt with specific parts of the manual.

The team's response to the first question is that immediate effects have been observed—the school completed the study as outlined, the Steering Committee found the process to be valuable, and the faculty found the rating session to be so. Yet it is too early to say what the ultimate effect will be, if any. Year 5 of the Kentucky writing project will entail assessing the writing scores of schools which have completed the *School Study of Writing Instruction* and comparing them to scores from earlier years. Also, the ultimate effect may depend on what priorities schools choose and act upon, as it may be that some corrective actions will have more impact than others.

The team's response to the second question is that other schools will be able to successfully conduct a *School Study* and find it valuable. A support of this conclusion is that the *School Study* is a targeted, research-based study, designed around 34 indicators of successful writing programs which were identified and replicated in many Kentucky schools. The study enables schools to evaluate their program by an established set of criteria in a data-based, organized fashion. A proof of the conclusion that this study may be repeated favorably in other schools was the pilot school's ability to customize it to suit its needs. Replication in other schools may partly depend on schools' need for facilitator assistance, which is expected to vary by schools' efficacy in general.

**Recommendation 16.** The *School Study of Writing Instruction* is recommended for ongoing implementation in Kentucky schools. The field test is currently exploring schools' need for facilitator assistance in more depth.

**Recommendation 17.** The *School Study of Writing Instruction* should be developed as a stand-alone product, not only for Kentucky writing programs, but for writing programs nationwide. An effective marketing plan should be written to meet this end. The manual should be produced so that it may stand alone in consideration of the fact that some schools that purchase it may not have facilitator assistance.

**Recommendation 18.** The research into indicators of successful writing programs as the basis for the *School Study of Writing Instruction* may be considered a model for development of other curricular needs assessment instruments (AEL, 1997b; Coe et al., 1999). Not all of this research base is specific to writing instruction; some parts are generic to teaching, learning, and school efficacy. Thus the *School Study* may be easily adapted as a self-study needs assessment for content areas other than writing. This being so, such a product with either generic topical applicability, or several products each tailored content-specific, should be produced and also disseminated nationwide (AEL, 1997a). A separate marketing plan should also be written to meet this end.

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# APPENDIXES



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**APPENDIX A:**

***Indicators of Successful School Writing Programs in Kentucky:***
***Executive Summary of Preliminary Findings***



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# Indicators of Successful School Writing Programs In Kentucky

## A Report of Selected Findings

**A joint project of AEL, Inc. and the Kentucky Department of Education**

In 1996 and 1997, a collaborative study team of researchers visited schools across Kentucky in an attempt to answer this question:

> What practices and conditions produce consistent improvement in students' portfolio writings, as measured by the portfolio assessment?

They interviewed more than 100 teachers, 200 randomly selected students, and 50 administrators in schools with various writing success rates—some consistently successful in raising scores, others consistently unsuccessful. Members of the research team include staff from AEL, along with staff and consultants from the Kentucky Writing Program.

The research phase of the five-year project—a joint project of AEL and the Kentucky Department of Education—sought to identify indicators of high performance. This report summarizes the conditions most frequently observed in the more successful schools. Scores improved consistently in these schools over a four-year period beginning in 1992, although beginning scores were not necessarily high. The study examined whether schools evolve through a common sequence of instructional practices and conditions as they grow increasingly effective in writing instruction. The team used 36 indicators to create a process that schools have used to plan improvements in their writing instruction. Department staff have also used the information to evaluate and plan future professional development offerings.

The following indicators are those most frequently observed in schools that improved writing portfolio scores over two consecutive accountability cycles.

### Selected Indicators Reflecting School/District Support of the Writing Program

- The district demonstrates commitment to the writing program by
  - allocating resources to professional development or technical assistance;
  - assigning program oversight to qualified personnel and allocating sufficient time for effective oversight;
  - compensating cluster leaders through additional pay or released time; and
  - in some districts, establishing policies requiring portfolio completion for promotion or graduation.
- The principal actively supports writing instruction by providing resources, technical assistance, and/or professional development, and by providing substitutes to allow teachers to meet together to score portfolios.
- A high degree of collegiality is evident among teachers. Portfolio scoring is a team event featuring discussion of instructional gaps, weaknesses, and strengths evident in student writing.
- Language arts teachers at the accountability grades are confident of their understanding of writing portfolio requirements; all have re-

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ceived professional development in the writing process, portfolio development, and scoring. They use *The Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook,* and feel they have reliable sources of information and assistance when needed.

- School writing leaders are satisfied with the level of training and support they have received to assist other teachers with portfolio development.
- Most language arts teachers at the non-accountability grade levels participate in professional development on writing instruction and portfolio development.

## Indicators Reflecting Instructional Strategies

- Students write frequently in all subjects, and the writing is integrated into instruction.
- Teachers in most grades and content areas give writing assignments that have the potential of contributing to students' "working portfolios."
- Teachers promote peer conferencing as well as student-teacher conferencing; students feel comfortable receiving help from and providing help to other students.
- Teachers spend substantial time on prewriting activities.
- Teachers focus on developing writers rather than developing portfolios so that, when it is time to put a portfolio together, students have a number of pieces from which to choose, most of which were written as a natural outcome of their studies.
- Teachers provide latitude for students to choose topics and/or formats when they write.
- Teachers model parts of the writing process as they work with students.
- The mechanics of writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation) are taught in the context of writing, rather than as unrelated drills and worksheets. Lessons are crafted to address needs evident in student writing.

Two indicators were less frequently observed, but appeared to have a powerful impact on students:

- Students write for "real-world" audiences and for real purposes. These audiences read and respond in some fashion to the writing.
- Teachers share their own writing with students and invite students' critiques.

### Students Talk About Their School Writing Experience

An important part of the research was the student interview. Students were interviewed to assess the effect of school conditions and practices on student attitudes and behavior with respect to writing. Students talked about their school writing experience and their perceptions of themselves as writers. In schools with continuously improving portfolio scores, student, teacher, and administrator accounts of writing instruction were highly consistent.

In schools with continuously improving portfolio scores, students commonly

- spoke of themselves as writers, rather than students who must complete writing assignments;
- spoke of writing as a routine part of their school day, rather than as separate tasks done to produce a portfolio;
- expected that writing competence will be necessary in adult life, whatever career path they may follow;
- described substantive ways their writing had improved from one year to the next, including choice of topics, organization, use of supporting details, spelling, grammar, and punctuation;
- expressed confidence that most students—including themselves—could become proficient writers with sufficient effort;
- worked with their peers on a regular basis to improve their writing—asking questions to clarify the author's intent, as well as giving and receiving suggestions for improvement;
- carried a folder of written work—their "working portfolio"—with them from year to year, and used it either to compare earlier work with current writing or to develop earlier work for current portfolios; and
- were familiar with the Kentucky benchmarks for novice through distinguished writing and used the vocabulary of the writing process.

To learn more about the research and school study process,* visit AEL's web site at http://www.ael.org/rel/state/ky/.

*A collaborative research project begun in 1996, conducted by staff members of AEL, Inc., the Kentucky Department of Education, and the Kentucky Regional Writing Consultants.

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## APPENDIX B:

"Time & Task Summary"



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**Time and Task Summary**

| What is the task? | How long does it take? | Who does it? |
|---|---|---|
| Select people to be interviewed, schedule interviews, select and, if necessary, train interviewers | ? Time depends on ease of recruiting interviewers and on whether training is necessary. | Steering committee |
| Complete an interview about writing instruction | About one hour for each interview | Four to 8 teachers and their interviewers (persons from outside the school) |
| Interview a random sample of 8-12 students (total) from the accountable grade, previous and following grades. | About four hours<br>Students can be interviewed in groups of two or three. Each interview takes 30 to 45 minutes. | Students and interviewer(s) (person or persons from outside the school.) |
| Gather data about resources available to the school's writing program | About one hour | Principal or his/her designee |
| Interview principal and district administrator | One hour each | Steering committee member(s) |
| Develop a summary report, using survey results, resource inventory and<br>student interviews. | One to two hours per person | Steering committee members and additional people, if needed |
| Make copies of the report for all faculty members. | One to two hours. | Support staff persons. |
| Prepare to lead faculty meeting to assess writing program | One hour | Steering committee |
| Using the report, assess school's strengths and needs on the analysis form provided. | Three hours | Entire faculty led by the steering committee[1,2] |
| *(Optional)*<br>Prepare to facilitate faculty meeting to choose improvement priorities. Copy materials needed in meeting. | One hour | Steering committee |
| *(Optional)*<br>Decide on improvement priorities. | Three hours | Steering committee and faculty |

[1]The faculty will work in small groups on different sections of the analysis form. This approach deepens the faculty's understanding of their writing program's strengths and needs and increases commitment to improvements.

[2]Schools that are so large that it is unworkable to include all faculty in this meeting can select a representative sample of teachers from each department or grade. A group of 18 to 24 people is adequate to complete the rating task. However, try to include as many teachers as possible in order to build understanding of the writing program across the faculty.

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**APPENDIX C:**

**"Report Form"**



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**School Study of Writing Instruction**
**Report Form**

**NAME OF SCHOOL:** _____

**REPORT COMPLETED:** (Month) _____ (Year) _____

**NAMES OF PEOPLE WHO DEVELOPED THIS REPORT:**

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

See the guide for completing this report before beginning work.

When completed, make copies for all faculty members and distribute.

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## Indicators of Writing Portfolio Improvement

1. **Administrative support**

   a. District level

   b. School level

**Other** (information other than that obtained through the study):

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2. **Availability and effective use of quality training/technical assistance**

A. Training of writing leaders

- Building level

- District level

**Other:**

B. Training of portfolio-accountable teachers (language arts teachers in departmentalized schools; otherwise, all teachers responsible for teaching writing at the accountable grade level)

**Other:**

C. Extent to which <u>all</u> teachers are trained in writing instruction

a. Administrator perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

D. Attention to writing that is appropriate for content areas other than language arts:

a. Administrator perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

E. Teacher training in scoring

a. Administrator perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

F. Portfolios scored by a team of teachers with diverse membership (more than just accountable grade or English teachers)

a. Administrator perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

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G. Evidence of mentoring/informal professional development

a. Administrator perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

H. Level of strategic collaboration in professional development

a. Administrator perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

3. **Coordination**

A. Coordination across grade levels including between elementary and middle school; middle and high school

a. Administrator perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

B. Coordination across subject areas

a. Administrator perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

4. **Supportive school climate** and easy, frequent communication among staff

   a. Administrator perspective:

   b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

5. Evidence of **communication with families** about writing instruction and family support of the writing program

   a. Administrator perspective:

   b. Teacher perspective:

   c. Student perspective

**Other:**

6. Evidence of **use of community resources** in the writing program

   a. Administrator perspective:

   b. Teacher perspective:

c. Student perspective:

**Other:**

7. **Focus and intensity** of writing instruction programs and degree to which writing and/or writing portfolios are a clear school priority

   a. Administrator perspective:

   b. Teacher perspective

   **Other:**

**Instructional strategies**

8. Use of *The Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook, 2nd Edition* as a resource by all teachers teaching writing

   Teacher perspective:

   **Other:**

9. Evidence that teachers and students focus on **writing**

   A. Evidence that portfolios are not the sole focus of the writing program

      a. Teacher perspective:

      b. Student perspective:

   **Other:**

B. Evidence that students speak of themselves as writers rather than simply completers of writing assignments

Student perspective only:

**Other:**

C. Evidence that students have the opportunity to compare current writing with writing completed earlier—even in previous years—and can describe how their writing has improved

a. Student perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

D. Evidence that teachers require more challenging work from students than they once did because students come better prepared

a. Student perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

E. Evidence of students' confidence that they can eventually reach proficiency

Student perspective only:

**Other:**

10. Evidence that students routinely use the writing process and know the steps in the process.

A. Students refer to the steps in the writing process when talking about their own writing.

Student perspective only:

B. Students are aware of criteria for judging portfolios (and ways in which they learned these criteria)

a. Student perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

C. Use of computer to facilitate writing

a. Student perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

D. Use of feedback to improve writing (conferencing with teachers, family, or other students)

a. Student perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

11. Teacher writing

A. Evidence that teachers write and share their writing with students (writing assignments, journal writing, etc.)

a. Teacher perspective:

b. Student perspective:

**Other:**

B. Evidence that teachers introduce students to the many functions of writing in adult life

a. Teacher perspective:

b. Student perspective:

**Other:**

12. Evidence of student choice of topics and formats for particular writing assignments

    a. Teacher perspective:

    b. Student perspective:

**Other:**

13. Evidence of real-world writing

    A. Evidence of students having the opportunity to use writing for real-world purposes

        a. Teacher perspective:

        b. Student perspective:

**Other:**

B. Evidence that students are aware of the audiences they are writing for and that the audiences are important to them

a. Student perspective:

b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

14. Evidence that writing instruction is integrated into general instruction

A. Teachers assign reading as a source of ideas and models for writing for a variety of purposes

a. Teacher perspective:

b. Student perspective:

**Other:**

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B. Mechanics taught in context of writing

a. Teacher perspective:

b. Student perspective:

**Other:**

15. Evidence of consistency of the messages students receive about writing from different teachers

    a. Student perspective:

    b. Teacher perspective:

**Other:**

16. Consistency among student/teacher/administrator perspectives (overall)

**APPENDIX D:**

**"Table of Report Sections and Data"**



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## School Study of Writing Instruction
## Table of report sections and data

| Report section | Data |
|---|---|
| 1. Administrative support - district (report topic 1A)<br>Administrative support - school (report topic 1B) | District administrator interview; teacher interview q. 12, 13, 15-18.<br>Principal's interview; teacher interview q. 10-14, 17, 23 - 26 |
| 2. Professional development (report topics 2A-2D)<br><br>Writing program coordination (report topics 3 A and B)<br>Focus on writing (report topic 7) | Teacher interviewquestions 15-22; Principal interview; district administrator interview<br>Teacher interview questions 13, 14<br><br>Student interview question 6-8<br>Teacher interview questions 6, 9,13-19, principal interview |
| 3. Scoring and school climate (report topics 2E-H, 4) | Teacher interview questions 18c, 20-27; principal interview |
| 4. Instructional strategies I (report topics 8, 9 A-E) | Teacher interviewquestions 1, 2, 7, 10, 30, 42<br>Student interview questions 1-6, 20-22 |
| 5. Instructional strategies II (report topics 10 A-D, 11 A-B) | Teacher interview questions 28, 31, 32, 34, 35, 40, 41, 44, 45; Student interview questions 9 - 14, 18, 19 |
| 6. Instructional strategies III (report topics 12, 13 A-B, 14 A-B) | Teacher interview questions 33, 36-39<br>Student interview questions 15-17 |
| 7. Family and community involvement (report topics 5-6) | Principal interview questions 27-29; teacher interview questions 46-47; student interview questions 23-27 |
| 8. Overall view of the value for students of the writing portfolio program in its current form (report topics 15, 16) | Teacher interview/survey q. 1-9. Principal interview q. 1-7; district administrator interview q. 1-7; student interview questions 28-32. |

**Note:** *Committee members should scan the full interview before focusing on the questions for their assigned sections of the report. Responses that address one report topic can appear in answers to questions not obviously related to that topic.*



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**APPENDIX E:**

**"Rating Guide"**



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# SCHOOL STUDY OF WRITING INSTRUCTION
# RATING GUIDE

## I Administrative support

**A. District level**—Administrative support includes any formal or informal evidence that the district administration gives the writing program high priority in the district curriculum. Such support may look different from district to district depending on the resources of the district, the number of central office staff, and local history and culture. The key criterion is that, for this district, consistent effort is going into proactive encouragement of the writing program.

**High**—The district supports the program by seeking district policies intended to stimulate writing improvement, encouraging and supporting school initiatives to improve writing (e.g., providing funds for professional development above that expected by the state, providing release time for mentoring), recruiting and/or training expert, facilitative central office staff to provide technical assistance and mentor school staff, organizing portfolio scoring for the district to ensure accuracy, organizing cross-school or cross-grade conversations about writing instruction.

**Medium**—The district supports the program by providing assistance to schools in support of the writing program that is perceived by the school staff as more facilitative than is provided in other curriculum areas (for instance, encouraging schools to provide more training for teachers than is generally expected but requiring them to use school professional development funds for the purpose), identifying some of the more successful practitioners to facilitate the writing program at the district level.

**Low**—The district does only the minimum required by the state, assigning portfolio oversight to personnel who lack clear qualifications or successful practice, maintaining bureaucratic oversight of schools' writing programs with little or no technical assistance.

Example of a medium to low district we have visited: The district had a cluster leader who served as mentor to the writing leader in the school but subsequently assigned that staff member to a different assignment that prevents her from visiting schools and mentoring writing leaders. The district encourages schools to use their professional development funds to send the writing leader and intern teachers to intensive professional development workshops not available to most teachers but does not make any district funds available for the purpose. No stipends are provided, but expenses are paid—in sharp distinction to what is provided for "extra" professional development in other areas.

**B. School level**—Administrative support includes any formal or informal evidence that the school administration gives the writing program high priority in the school curriculum.

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**High**—School administrators provide active leadership; changing schedules to allow additional time for planning, conferencing or dialogue among teachers or time for instructional aides or volunteers to conference with students; providing extra time and/or payment for lead teachers, encouraging generous allocations for professional development and instructional resources in writing in the school budget and finding additional funds when needed to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities; participating in professional development with teachers; serving as readers for student writing, participating in portfolio scoring, initiating efforts to bring student work to real world audiences.

Example from a school we visited: To illustrate that active principal leadership need not always be hands-on, we visited a school where the principal did not personally participate in the writing program but encouraged teachers at all grade levels to take as much training as possible in the writing process and in portfolio development. In addition, he persuaded the school council to allocate a full-time aide to the fourth grade, to allow extra planning time for fourth-grade teachers and an additional adult to conference with students about their writing. He delegated full responsibility for the writing program to the fourth-grade teachers, who were regarded as the school's writing leaders, but he made sure they had more resources than teachers at other grade levels (for instance, were able to take more field trips if they felt it was necessary for the writing program) and celebrated the creative ideas they had to stimulate student writing and to share that writing with real-world audiences for purposes that were important to the students.

**Medium**—School administrators make sure that teachers are provided with up-to-date information, professional development and hands-on technical assistance from competent district staff; provide release time or stipends for extra duties associated with the writing program, such as portfolio scoring; allow and encourage teachers to participate in professional development over and above that called for in the school's P.D. Plan; but let the central office take the lead in encouraging the writing program and do not change the school's staffing or organization to improve the writing program.

Example: We visited a high school where the principal had no direct involvement in the writing program but rather delegated responsibility for encouraging the program to an assistant principal and the cluster leader. The cluster leader took the initiative to approach the KDE Writing Program to answer questions she had about whether particular types of real-world writing were appropriate to include in the portfolio, and she was able to involve non-language arts teachers in the writing program to an unusual degree, but primarily on the basis of her own reputation in the school, not administrative support.

**Low**—School administrators obey state directives at a minimum level, perhaps monitoring implementation of the writing program without actively assisting in it, failing to encourage professional development in writing for most teachers and providing no special resources to enhance writing instruction or portfolio development.

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**2. Availability and use of quality professional development/technical assistance**

This indicator refers to the **entire writing program**, not just portfolio development and/or scoring. Consider both **formal** and **informal** opportunities. **Formal professional development** denotes planned experiences led by one or more experts in the field. **Informal professional development** denotes mentoring relationships, coaching, electronic networks, peer dialogues about writing instruction sustained over time, technical assistance provided on request to individual teachers. The first three items below ask for a global assessment of the quality and quantity of professional development (in the broad sense) received by teachers at the school. The remaining items under this heading require judgments about specific types of training or informal professional development opportunities of particular interest to this project.

A. **For writing leaders** (cluster leaders or other teachers assigned responsibility for the writing program)

—BUILDING LEVEL

**High**—Writing leaders are encouraged to participate in much more than the minimum professional development on writing expected of those in their positions; they seek out appropriate conferences and workshops to attend, have a support network (within the district, with peers in other districts, with consultants, and with KDE Writing Program staff, and have sources of on-demand technical assistance and/or coaching, which they find helpful. In turn they provide more training and support than is expected of them to the teachers with whom they work and encourage them to seek additional professional development in writing (strengthening their own skills by instructing others).

**Medium**—Writing leaders are encouraged to seek out appropriate conferences, workshops, and technical assistance but are unable to avail themselves of all appropriate opportunities because of school or district limitations (e.g., financial limits, isolation, lack of substitutes, etc.) or personal limitations (e.g., a demanding family situation). Opportunities to share what they have learned with teachers in the school may also be limited, for some of the same reasons. They have a limited support network to call on.

Example: One teacher in the school is the designated writing program leader and is encouraged to attend conferences and workshops but has limited knowledge of what is available. She has never attended the summer workshop at Western Kentucky University, for instance, even though the district is less than 200 miles from Bowling Green. One or two people in or near the district constitute her support network and sources of information; not being a cluster leader, she does not have access to the networking resources provided through the state department of education. She has structured the school's writing program around writing instruction in her own field (Title I), and she clearly understands the writing process better than any of the teachers with whom she works.

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**Low**—Writing leaders have attended the minimum amount of professional development on writing expected of people with their responsibilities. They have either not sought or have not had the support necessary to participate in additional training. They have formed no support networks. They have provided minimum support to other teachers in the school.

**B.** For **portfolio accountable teachers** (teachers responsible for teaching writing at the accountable grade; in departmentalized schools, teachers of language arts)

**High**—Teachers responsible for writing at the accountable grade level have participated in much more than the minimum professional development on writing expected of those in their positions (including training in portfolio scoring). They attend conferences, have a support network and are able to use on-demand technical assistance and/or coaching, which has been helpful. They feel some responsibility to let other teachers who are less accountable for student portfolios know how to work with students to improve portfolios.

**Medium**—Only some teachers of writing at the accountable grade level have received extensive training; others have had professional development in the writing process and in portfolio scoring but tend to rely on a few leaders, who have developed a support network to rely on and who are willing to support the less involved teachers.

**Low**—Writing teachers have attended the minimum amount of professional development on writing expected of people with their responsibilities (if they are cluster leaders) or no more professional development than most other Kentucky writing teachers (if they are not cluster leaders). They have either not sought or have not had the support necessary to participate in additional training. They have formed no support networks. They have provided minimum support to other teachers in the school.

**C.** For **other teachers** (Other teachers include both teachers in subject areas other than language arts and language arts teachers in non-accountable grades.)

**High**—Interviewees reported that teachers have participated in much more than the minimum professional development on writing expected of those in their positions (often because the school or district has sponsored extensive inservice professional development in the writing process). They attend conferences, support one another routinely, and have resources for on-demand technical assistance and/or coaching which they find helpful.

Example of teachers supporting one another routinely: The primary teachers at one elementary school we visited have worked together to design and develop a cumulative portfolio, starting with only a few pieces in the first year of the primary program and adding additional pieces each year so that students leaving the primary program and

entering fourth grade have a full working portfolio. The fourth-grade teachers work closely with the primary teachers to help them develop these working portfolios, and students report that putting together their final primary portfolio was a more rigorous learning experience than putting together the final, fourth-grade portfolio.

**Medium**—Most teachers interviewed have participated in workshops or other professional development on the writing process and on scoring portfolios, but content area teachers or teachers at other than the accountable grade level make little use of the training, as they depend on writing teachers at the accountable grade level to take primary responsibility for the writing program and for portfolios. There is minimal networking, as writing teachers talk with other teachers about what they can do to strengthen students' writing skills and their portfolios.

> Example: At most of the departmentalized schools we have visited writing in the content areas has been the most problematic part of the writing program even when the content area teachers were convinced that writing was important to their disciplines, which they frequently were not. Finding appropriate professional development opportunities has often been difficult. In a high school where the great majority of the content area teachers cooperated willingly with the English department in writing instruction, the English teachers themselves asked that the content area teachers follow the writing process only through the first draft stage. After that, if the piece was considered appropriate for a portfolio, the piece would be sent to the English department and English teachers would work with the student to edit and publish the piece for inclusion in the portfolio. At other high schools, language arts teachers complained that content area teachers would send them writing pieces that simply were not good enough to be included in a portfolio or that were based on inadequate prompts.

**Low**—Teachers have attended the minimum amount of professional development on writing expected of teachers in their content area or grade. They have either not sought or have not had the support necessary to participate in additional training. They have formed no support networks. They have neither sought nor provided support to other teachers in the school.

### D. Attention to writing that is appropriate for content areas other than language arts

**High**—Recent professional development opportunities for all teachers have featured ways to incorporate writing authentically into content areas other than language arts, and the school writing leader or leaders have followed up with continued technical assistance to help teachers use the instruction. In addition, teachers in content areas other than language arts may have been encouraged to take intensive instruction in writing for their content areas and have subsequently shared what they have learned with others in the school.

**Medium**—Some but not all teachers have had the opportunity for professional development

emphasizing how to incorporate writing into content areas other than language arts. These opportunities may have been made available only to non-language arts teachers who have expressed a particular interest in using writing to enhance their instruction.

**Low**—There is no evidence that attention to writing that is appropriate for content areas other than language arts has been identified as a school need, and no one appears to be seeking professional development in this area.

**E. Teacher training and participation in portfolio scoring**

**High**—Portfolio scoring training is available to all teachers in the school but is voluntary for teachers who are not on the scoring team. The portfolio team includes teachers from subject matters other than language arts and/or from non-accountable grade levels, and the team's membership changes fairly frequently, to encourage participation by any teacher who is interested.

**Medium**—Only teachers who are on the scoring team receive training in portfolio scoring, the team consists only of those who teach writing at the accountable grade level, and the composition of the team has changed minimally over the years (frequently only as teachers move from one grade level to another or retire).

> Example: One of the schools we visited has a scoring team consisting of all the fourth-grade teachers. Students at all grade levels (primary and upper elementary) are required to keep portfolios, and each grade-level team of teachers scores its own students' portfolios. Teachers at the non-accountable grade levels are trained by the grade-level scoring team, after it has had updated training each spring.

**Low**—Only accountable grade level teachers score, and they do so in isolation.

**F. Evidence of ongoing mentoring and informal professional development**

**High**—Teachers are members of formal teams (subject-matter teams, grade-level teams, primary "families," special purpose teams) that are given adequate time for meeting and planning. In addition, networks with teachers outside the school are encouraged through sending teachers to appropriate professional development opportunities at regular intervals (e.g., professional association annual meetings, summer institutes, and the like), providing e-mail access for electronic networking, providing release time if needed to network with peers outside the school, etc. Informal networking and mentoring within the school is also encouraged and celebrated.

**Medium**—Teams of teachers within the school are given common planning time, but the teachers report either that it is inadequate for substantive work or that they do not make consistent use of it. Networking with teachers outside the school is possible if a teacher persists in following up opportunities, but is not a school priority. Informal mentoring and

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networking within the school are tolerated but not encouraged.

**Low**—There is minimal communication between teachers and administrators, mostly formal communications concerning the school. Teachers seldom talk among themselves about issues of teaching and learning, and any discussion of students' writing is at a superficial level.

G. **Level of strategic collaboration in professional development**—This indicator refers to degree to which the school faculty has participated together and support one another in professional development experiences linked with identified school needs.

**High**—Teachers show awareness of the professional development plan and its connection with school weaknesses; most have had a part in developing the plan. Professional development is often school-wide. Teachers who attend conferences or workshops beyond school-based professional development attend as representatives of their school and are expected to bring learnings back to their colleagues. Teachers describe instances of giving and receiving help from one another.

**Medium**—Teachers are aware of the professional development plan but most were not involved in developing the plan and they appear to know the specifics only so far as they are directly affected. Collegiality is encouraged, and there is informal collaboration (self-selected groups who share), but these groups appear to be mutually exclusive and not everyone is included in one. There is no formal mechanism--or encouragement--for teachers to support one another in professional development experiences.

**Low**—Decisions about what professional development is needed are commonly made individually, and teachers may be unaware of the specifics of the professional development plan developed at the school. When teachers are trained together, they are in role-alike and/or grade-alike groups. Teachers are generally unaware of their colleagues' level of training or expertise, and they are not encouraged or required to share what they learn in workshops with other teachers. They do not mention instances where teachers have helped one another and they do not appear to link identified school needs with professional development.

**3. Coordination across grade and subject areas**

Since writing is an area in which students should be making steady, ongoing improvement, coordination of the writing program across grade and subject areas is an asset to the program (but is not the norm).

**High**—In departmentalized schools, teachers from different subject area departments share in the same professional development on writing and compare notes on a regular basis to ensure that the writing program is implemented in a planned, consistent manner to produce integrated, well designed writing instruction. In all schools, teachers from adjacent grade

levels compare notes on a regular basis to ensure that writing instruction is consistent as students progress from grade to grade and that student progress in writing is well documented



as they move from grade to grade (for instance, through the development of a cumulative portfolio). Feeder schools provide the schools that students move on to with adequate information about each student's progress in writing and meet to ensure that the writing program at the higher level school builds on the program at the feeder school.

**Medium**—In departmentalized schools, teachers from different subject area departments are encouraged but not required to participate in the same professional development on writing and to confer with one another periodically about the way writing is used in each subject area. Some teachers do this, but others do not. Similarly, teachers at adjacent grade levels may or may not coordinate their writing programs; usually some effort is made to ensure that student writing moves with the student from grade to grade, but the effort is not always successful. Teachers at the accountable grade levels are usually the most conscientious about coordination with other teachers.

**Low**—No effort is made to coordinate writing instruction across subject areas or across grade levels. Individual teachers may express frustration at the lack of coordination.

**4. School climate/communication**

This indicator includes any evidence that relationships among administrators, teachers, students, and parents are friendly, collegial, and facilitate the development of the writing program.

**High**—Frequent, relaxed and cordial communication occurs among administrators, teachers, aides and support staff; with evidence of mutual respect and liking among faculty, staff and students, as well as any parents who may be present; with perhaps evidence from school displays and conversation that writing is valued as a worthwhile and enjoyable activity; teams of teachers who clearly work well together are another sign of a positive school climate.

Example: An elementary school we visited has a large number of students whose parents transport them to school and some students were consistently tardy. Now the school starts every morning with an assembly to get the day off to a happy, enthusiastic start. Teachers are responsible for planning the assembly, which generally features either a speaker from the local community or students who have done something worth exhibiting. If students are late, it does not disrupt instruction, but students are now pressuring their parents to get them to school on time because they enjoy the assembly, and parents occasionally stay to attend the assembly with their children. The school has an extremely diverse student population, both ethnically and economically, but the administrators and staff reach out to all students and all parents in ways that appear to make all feel welcome and included.

**Medium**—Cordial but businesslike relationships exist among administrators, teachers, staff, and support aides, with little emphasis on teamwork or meeting the needs of the "whole

child"; there may be an emphasis on academic excellence but not on teamwork to produce academic excellence.

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**Low**—Hallway, lunchroom and teachers' lounge conversations are generally unrelated to instruction; minimal and formal communication between teachers and administrators, with support staff always clearly subordinate to teachers; an emphasis on order (and usually silence) in the hallways and in the classrooms, with exchanges between adults and students in non-classroom settings primarily directive rather than social. Hall and classroom displays appear to be mostly adult-created (or "cookie-cutter" student work), with little apparent value given to student writing.

5. **Evidence of communication with families and family support of the writing program**.

**High**—The school recruits and trains volunteers to help in the classroom (for example, to free teachers for conferencing, to read and give feedback on student writing, to share their own writing, to talk about the kind of writing necessary in their jobs.) In "family night" sessions, through newsletters, or through formal training, the school provides information to families about writing levels expected of students and ways parents can help at home. A conscious effort is made to help parents feel comfortable in the school.

Example: An elementary school we visited provides classes for parents through the library program. The first class provided last fall was instruction in the writing process and appropriate ways for parents to work with children at home on writing. At the same school, one of the children we interviewed described how she herself had instructed her mother in appropriate conferencing techniques.

**Medium**—The school provides written information to parents about the writing process and suggests ways they can help students at home with writing assignments, but does not actively recruit parents to help in the classroom. Individual teachers may encourage parents to volunteer in the classroom or give them pointers on how to work with children at home on writing.

**Low**—Any communication to parents about the writing process stresses what they should not do (e.g., make suggestions that usurp the child's ownership of the writing) rather than active ways they can help. Parents are not encouraged to volunteer in the classrooms, although a few active parent volunteers may be tolerated. No effort is made to explain to parents how a child's writing skills are progressing.

6. **Evidence that the school uses community resources in the writing program**

**High**—The writing leader actively seeks resources for such programs as having a writer visit the school for a period and work with students on writing as well as explaining how he/she makes a living as a writer. Individual teachers are encouraged to invite into the classroom

people in the community who use writing in interesting ways in their adult careers. Such people may also be asked to judge school writing competitions or projects. Community firms or businesses may be asked to support the school's writing program in various ways (for instance, exhibiting student writing or providing prizes for a contest).

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Example: Each year at a small town elementary school the fourth-grade students organize a blood drive for the local health department. They make all the arrangements for a blood drive at the school, and then they write persuasive pieces to convince members of the community to participate. Before the drive, they parade through their small town leaving these persuasive pieces at each store, to be distributed to the patrons. They also talk to their parents and neighbors about the blood drive. The blood drive requires expository writing, describing how to organize a blood drive, it leads to research on blood types, the need for blood, and how the blood will be used. Some students write personal narratives or fiction based on the research they have done.

**Medium**—Individual teachers seek out community resources to enrich the writing program from time to time, but it is not a school priority.

Example: The writing leader at a small, rural elementary school invited the school superintendent to visit the school and talk to the students about the many ways in which writing had played a part in his career. She wanted to find some way to support a writer in residence program but, to date, the visit by the superintendent was the only effort made at the school to use community resources to enhance the writing program.

**Low**—There is no evidence that community resources are used in the school's writing program

**7. Focus and intensity of writing instruction programs**

This indicator requires a global assessment of the degree to which writing and/or writing portfolios are a clear school priority.

**High**—There is abundant evidence that the school communicates to students the importance attached to writing. Student writing is prominently displayed in the hallways and in classrooms, and classroom walls display posters emphasizing various aspects of writing instruction/portfolio development. Interviews with administrators, teachers, and students are consistent in revealing the importance placed on writing at the school—and interviewees agree that writing well is an important life skill. If events outside the control of the school administrators interfere with instruction, an effort is made to ensure that it does not interfere with students' opportunity to work on writing.

**Medium**—Writing is a clear school priority, but there is a lack of focus in the writing program. Students do not articulate the importance of writing as clearly as teachers and administrators do, or they may reveal ignorance of strategies that teachers report using in writing instruction. There is a clearer focus on portfolio development than on writing as a valuable part of education, and writing may be a focus only part of the year. Teachers may draw a clear distinction between writing assignments meant for the portfolio and other

writing assignments. Teachers are ambivalent about the value of writing, on the one hand considering it valuable but on the other hand resenting the time it takes away from other subject matter to do process writing (since writing is not well integrated into instruction).

**Low**—Writing appears to be stressed only at the accountable grade levels and only for the

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purposes of developing writing portfolios as part of the state assessment program. Teachers and students resent the demand to assemble writing portfolios and many dislike writing.

**8. Use of *The Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook, 2nd Edition* as a resource by all teachers teaching writing**

This indicator is strongly related to the overall priority placed on writing at the school and the leadership abilities of cluster leaders and other writing leaders in the school. If a school uses a district-produced Handbook rather than that produced by the state Writing Project, it should be examined or described well enough so that a judgment can be made whether it is or is not equivalent.

**High**—Every teacher in the school received the Handbook and guidance in using it as part of professional development, and the writing leader(s) in the school continue to work with teachers to demonstrate productive uses for the Handbook. Teachers at all grade levels and in all subjects report using the Handbook consistently, though they may turn to the Handbook only during certain parts of the year (for instance, when introducing students to the benchmarks for the various performance levels or when preparing to score portfolios). If they do not turn to the Handbook frequently, they report that they are familiar enough with the content so that they do not need it for general reference purposes any more. Students exhibit familiarity with the benchmarks and the criteria for the various performance levels.

**Medium**—All portfolio-accountable teachers have copies of the Handbook and use it as described above, and a few other teachers who have a particular interest in the writing process may have been able to get a copy. Other teachers have guides to teaching writing that are not as extensive as the Handbook (often produced by a local writing leader) or have gained their knowledge of portfolio development entirely from professional development workshops. Some teachers are not aware that the full Handbook exists.

**Low**—Only the teachers who are on the portfolio scoring team have copies of the Handbook, and they refer to it only when preparing to score portfolios.

**9. Evidence that teachers and students focus on <u>writing</u>**

**A.** Evidence that developing competent writers, not just portfolios, is the focus of the writing program.

It is to be expected that any school in Kentucky will focus on completing writing portfolios. There should also be a focus on writing for its own sake or as an important part of instruction. A key criterion here is the degree to which portfolio writing is integrated into classroom instruction or is seen as separate from classroom instruction (inevitably interfering with other

instruction).

**High**—Writing is part of instruction at all grade levels and in all subject areas. Writing to learn and writing to exhibit learning are stressed as valuable, in addition to portfolio-appropriate writing. Writing assignments are not differentiated into portfolio assignments and other assignments, and potential portfolio pieces may come from a wide variety of sources, including



writing the student has done for non-school related purposes. Students are exposed to a variety of ways in which writing is needed for adult life and in vocational areas. Teachers are conscious of developing their own writing skills and of the importance of students' enjoying writing. Both teachers and students can describe their progress as writers.

**Medium**—Writing is part of instruction at all grade levels but some subject matter teachers resent any demand that they incorporate writing into their instruction and refuse to do so. There is more emphasis on writing in the accountable grades and during the time that portfolios are being prepared than at other times, although students do some writing throughout the school year and in every grade. Although students speak of themselves as writers and often write when they are not required to for school assignments, teachers generally do not write except when they need to for clearly defined purposes.

**Low**—Writing is neglected in the school curriculum except for the preparation of writing portfolios—and sometimes for practice in answering open response questions. Writing assignments are clearly identified as portfolio assignments and are not integrated into instruction.

B. Evidence that teachers require more challenging work from students than they once did because students come better prepared

**High**—When asked to account for the improvements in student writing, most teachers mention that writing has been well taught in previous grades so they are able to work with students at a much higher level than previously. Both teachers and students describe particular assignments that require more than students previously would have been asked to do at that grade level.

**Medium**—Teachers report that student writing has improved over the years and that they now require more of students than they used to, but add that some students have always had the capacity to do the work now required and that some students come to them still lacking the skills to do the work they now require.

**Low**—Teachers report that teachers at previous grade levels have not done a good job of teaching writing and that this hampers portfolio development because they must spend time working on basics that the students should have learned previously.

C. Evidence of students' confidence that they can eventually reach proficiency

**High**—All students interviewed at the school report that the portfolio standards are not too high for all (or most) students to reach—though they require hard work from most students. Students may add that not all students are willing to put forth the effort required, but they consider themselves good writers and report that they are making the effort personally. Teachers and administrators agree that most students—over time—should be able to reach the standards and feel responsible for helping them do this. (If teachers see instruction as having impact on the quality of students' writing to become proficient, this



probably indicates that the school is higher than "medium" on the criterion, though not at the top of the scale.)

**Medium**—All or most of the students interviewed at the school report that the portfolio standards are not too high for all (or most) students to reach—though they require hard work from most students. Students may add that not all students are willing to put forth the effort required, but they consider themselves good writers and report that they are making the effort personally. Most teachers have reservations about the ability of some students to become proficient, either because they lack the ability (some have writing talent and some don't) or because they lack motivation or and adequate home environment. (Teachers may give other, less self serving reasons: e.g., the schools will never have adequate support or time to bring all students to the proficient level; or they may criticize the performance level itself, e.g., "proficient" is developmentally inappropriate at my grade level.)

**Low**—Students express doubt that they will ever become proficient or say that a number of other students will not be able to do so. Teachers have major reservations of the sort described under "Medium."

**10. Evidence that students routinely use and can describe the steps in the writing process**

A.. Students are familiar with and use the writing process

**High**—All students interviewed name the essential steps of the writing process, of ten before they are asked to do so, and discuss cogently their importance in the students' development as writers.

**Medium**—Some of the students interviewed are highly aware of the steps of the writing process and can discuss their importance, while others must be asked fairly specific questions before they discuss them. Most students, however, exhibit some awareness of the various components of the writing process and have gone through them with at least some of their teachers.

**Low**—Students fail to discuss some steps of the writing process at all (for instance, pre-writing or publication) and generally seem unaware that the various components of the process are important to help them develop as writers.

B. Students are aware of criteria for judging portfolios (and ways in which they learned these criteria)

**High**—All the students interviewed report that each year one or more teachers reviews the criteria with them, going over and discussing benchmarks or particular pieces of writing that exemplify a particular performance level. Students are given written material reminding them of the criteria for each performance level, and the criteria are displayed or reviewed periodically as portfolios are being prepared. Students may report using the benchmarks on their own initiative to assess their own and others' work.

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**Medium**—All students report having at least one teacher during the accountability year go over criteria for the various performance levels, or the criteria may be displayed but not addressed consistently. Students feel free to ask their writing teachers if they need any additional information.

**Low**—Students are not introduced to the criteria at all or are presented them in such simplified form that they are not really sure how their writing pieces are going to be judged.

C. **Use of computer to facilitate writing**

**High**—The school has sufficient computers so that students may have access to them at all stages of the writing process. Students have learned keyboarding skills at an early age, have access to the Internet at school and use computers to find information; they feel comfortable working on computers. Students have been encouraged to use the computer at all stages of the writing process and have learned from experience that this improves their writing, so most of the students interviewed choose to use the computer at all stages, even if they do not have computers at home.

**Medium**—The school has sufficient computers so that students may have access to them at all stages of the writing process, but this is a recent development and not all teachers or students have gotten used to it. Students who have computers at home still are more comfortable using the computer than those who do not and are more apt to use the computer at all stages of the writing process, but this is beginning to change, and the teachers are aware that students would benefit from greater use of the computer in writing.

**Low**—The school either does not have enough computers for all students to use them at all stages of the writing process or they are not yet sufficiently accessible to students. Teachers are generally unaware of the advantages of using the computer at all stages of writing so do not encourage students to do so. Students who have computers at home are at an advantage in using computers for writing than students who do not. Computers at school are used mostly to produce final copy, and some students may not have access to them even for that purpose.

D. Use of feedback to improve writing (conferencing with teachers, family, or other

students

**High**—Teachers and students both report that students conference with peers as well as with teachers as they revise their writing pieces and that the feedback they receive from both sources is helpful. Students show no reluctance to share their writing with peers, even students they may not know well; they say that students at the school all know what sort of questions are helpful. Students share their writing with family members and friends outside of school and ask for their feedback (teaching them how to ask helpful questions, if necessary). Neither teachers nor students report problems that prevent students from receiving as much feedback as they need during the writing process.

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Students clearly feel ownership of their writing.

Example: Teachers at one elementary school we visited taught primary students appropriate methods of conferencing and then made it clear that, since teachers and aides were not always available to conference with students, students who needed feedback were to find other students at about the same stage of composition and request a conference. Before they entered fourth grade, students had developed the habit of independently seeking feedback from other students as they worked on writing pieces. It was understood that they were supposed to do this, and they had the freedom to seek quiet places for the conferencing, including working quietly in the hallways.

**Medium**—Teachers and students report that students are expected to seek feedback from other students as well as teachers, but most students exhibit some reluctance to share their writing during intermediate stages. They may report avoiding conferencing with other students or seeking feedback only from close personal friends or students they trust to give good feedback. Teachers as well as students report that students seem to get more out of conferencing with teachers than out of conferencing with peers. They may have developed systems to increase the amount of time available for students to conference with adults (for instance, increase the amount of time instructional aides can spend working one-on-one with students) but still feel there is a problem finding enough time for conferencing with students.

**Low**—Even if teachers report that students do peer conferencing, the students report that they are seldom required to do this and that they can successfully avoid it most of the time. Teachers have little time to conference with students when they need help at various stages of the writing process, and they have not developed systems for increasing the amount of time instructors or aides are available to provide feedback to students. When they—or parents—do provide feedback, it tends to be primarily directive, so that students sometimes feel a piece of writing is no longer their work.

**11. Teacher writing**

Teachers who are not confident of their own ability as writers will presumably have difficulty helping students become proficient. Teachers who write with students appear to have a powerful effect on students' interest in writing and confidence that they can become proficient.

A. Evidence that teachers write and share their writing with students

**High**—All teachers interviewed at the school can describe instances when they temporarily abandon the role of "teacher" to write with students. Often this will be journal writing, but to rate a "high" rating on this attribute, teachers should be able to describe other occasions on which they write at the same time as the students—or when they complete a writing assignment they have given students and share their writing at the same time that students are sharing.

**Medium**—Some of the teachers interviewed can describe instances when they write with



students—but this is usually journal writing only. Some teachers report that they occasionally share with students a piece of writing that is appropriate for a writing assignment the students have been given. Students describe these instances also—and may actually remember instances of teachers writing with them that the teachers themselves do not describe to the interviewer, but it is clear that such instances are occasional.

Example: The power of teachers sharing their own writing with students was illustrated vividly during interviews with three ninth grade students in a rural school district in central Kentucky. When asked if they remembered any of their eighth grade teachers sharing writing with them in class, all three ninth graders (two girls and a boy) recalled that their eighth grade language arts teacher read a personal narrative that she wrote about her granddaughter. The students remembered the teacher's narrative as being interesting. That particular teacher retired at the conclusion of the school year and much happened to the trio of students in their ninth grade (the interviews were conducted in May), still they quickly recalled the time she shared a personal piece of writing with them in the previous school year.

**Low**—Neither teachers nor students describe any instances of teachers writing with students, other than writing on the chalkboard and requiring students to copy what they have written.

B. Evidence that teachers introduce students to the many functions of writing in adult life

**High**—Teachers report that they frequently talk with students about the ways they use writing in their everyday life and point out adult accomplishments that require writing. From time to time, they invite adults in a variety of occupations to the classroom to discuss the role of writing in their work. Students are aware of a large number of ways in which writing is needed in adult life and can describe them to the interviewer.

**Medium**—Some of the teachers interviewed discuss specific instances in which they brought to students' attention the need for writing in one adult role or another. On rare

occasions, an adult may have been invited to the school to enhance writing instruction by talking about the role of writing in their life and work. Students are aware that they will need to write as adults and can describe to the interviewer at least a few ways they anticipate writing as adults.

**Low**—There is no evidence from either teachers or students that there is any discussion in the school of the role of writing in adult life and work.

**12. Evidence of <u>student choice</u> of topics and formats for particular writing assignments**

**High**—All teachers interviewed at the school report that most assignments provide students with choice (appropriate to the subject area). Some assignments provide students with a 3rating.g
format and a range of subjects within a particular prompt, but others allow students to choose the format to address a particular topic or allow for choice of both format and topic. Students are also encouraged to add to their writing folders pieces they have written not for school assignments but for real world purposes outside school. Students agree with the teachers that they have many opportunities for choice of both format and topic in their writing and that most teachers give them opportunities for choice.

**Medium**—Most teachers interviewed report giving assignments that specify format and the general topic area but allow students to make specific choices within the general area. Teachers may provide students with a list of possible topics or may brainstorm possible topics with the class and allow students to select from the list or choose a similar topic themselves. A few teachers report giving students a greater range of choices than this. Students agree with the teachers' reports.

**Low**—All teachers interviewed report giving students a very narrow range of choices (for instance, specifying format and giving student three possible topics to choose among). Many writing assignments allow for no choice at all. Students agree that they exercise very little choice in their writing.

**13. Evidence of real-world writing**

**A.** Evidence of students having the opportunity to use writing for real-world purposes

**High**—Teachers interviewed report that students have frequent opportunities to write to real audiences and that these communications are intended to have actual results (for instance, letters to the school board asking for specific improvements in the building or the lunch program, or pamphlets—later delivered—explaining the school's rules to an entering class). Students tell detailed stories about this type of writing, including the purpose for writing, what they wrote and why, and what the response was.

Example: In one elementary school we visited, students were assigned to write to their parents prior to Christmas to ask for a particular present the child wanted very much. The letters were mailed to the parents, and the children were able to tell the interviewer how his/her parents had responded to it.

**Medium**—Teachers report a variety of assignments to write to real audiences, but the letters are generally informational and not intended to produce particular results (for instance, letters to pen pals in other states or other countries). Teachers may also report a variety of assignments to write for imaginary audiences and may not differentiate sharply between the imaginary and the real audiences, understanding both as "real world writing." Students' accounts agree with those of their teachers, except that students are normally quite aware which audiences are imaginary and which are real.

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**Low**—Neither teachers nor students mention writing for real world purposes to actual audiences at all, and they do not describe such writing even when specifically asked about it. Teachers either do not understand the term "real world writing" or describe writing for imaginary audiences when asked about it.

**B.** Evidence that students are aware of the audiences for which they are writing and that the audiences are important to them

**High**—Students discuss audience when asked to describe the writing process, and they differentiate clearly between imaginary or abstract audiences and actual audiences. They describe clearly what real audiences they have addressed in their writing, how they shape their writing to the audience, and why they think it's important to communicate with those audiences. They report that teachers expect them to incorporate pieces they have written to real audiences for real world purposes in their writing portfolios.

**Medium**—Most students talk about audience only when prompted by the interviewer, but it is clear that they do write at least occasionally to audiences who read what they write. Students may or may not be able to describe the audiences' reaction to what they wrote and may or may not think it is important to communicate with those audiences.

**Low**—Neither teachers nor students report writing to real audiences as part of the writing program. Teachers may describe imaginary audiences in response to questions about real audiences.

**14. Evidence of integration of writing instruction into general instruction**

**A.** Teachers using reading as a source of ideas and models for writing for a variety of purposes

**High**—Teachers and students who are interviewed consistently talk about reading (in

language arts or any of the other subject areas) as models for writing in that area and as a source of ideas for formats and topics.

**Medium**—Some teachers and students who are interviewed can talk about particular ways in which classroom reading has served as a source of ideas for formats or topics or as a model of a type of writing.

**Low**—Teachers and students discuss writing as totally separate from reading and do not draw the connection even when asked about reading as a source of ideas for writing.

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**B.** Language arts teachers teach mechanics in context of writing

**High**—Teachers and students who are interviewed report that mechanics are taught in the context of writing, primarily in mini-lessons designed to fit writing needs as they are identified. Students speak of improved spelling and punctuation as part of the overall writing process.

**Medium**—Teachers report that they are trying to fit mechanics in the content of writing, but what is taught usually is determined by the textbook rather than by student needs. They report reinforcing these lessons in the context of particular writing assignments or stressing in the lessons mechanics they know will be important to upcoming writing assignments.

**Low**—Teachers report teaching mechanics (spelling and grammar) as separate subjects. In teaching mechanics as drill, they follow the order of the textbook and do not make a special effort to teach mechanics with which students are having difficulty in their writing assignments.

**15. Evidence that students receive consistent messages, consistent with Kentucky Writing Program principles, from different teachers**

**High**—Teachers interviewed at the school talk about the writing program as an integrated whole, even if teachers in different subject areas have different contributions to make to it. Their description of the objectives and progress of the writing program at the school is essentially consistent from teacher to teacher and consistent with the way students describe the writing program.

**Medium**—A few teachers (usually language arts teachers) take the lead in implementing the writing program and have a clear vision among themselves but the vision is not shared with

other teachers; teachers in different subject areas or at different grade levels may have very different conceptions of the school's writing program. Students report different understandings of the school's writing program, depending on the teachers they have, or their account of writing instruction differs from their teachers' accounts.

Example: In a high school we visited, two language arts teachers appeared to be largely responsible for the school's success in improving portfolio scores. Their students, when interviewed, were articulate about the various steps in the writing process and described challenging, interesting writing assignments, while students of other language arts teachers described only "cookie-cutter" assignments and appeared unaware of the writing process as a whole.

**Low**—Students may receive consistent messages about writing, but the messages are that writing is not a school priority, and few or none of the faculty teach the writing process in the ways recommended by the Kentucky Writing Program.

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**16. Consistency among student/teacher/administrator perspectives**

This indicator requires a global judgment about the degree to which students, teachers, and administrators told the same story in response to the same or similar questions.

**High**—There were virtually no inconsistencies in what students, teachers, and administrators had to say; all described the writing program in the same way, discussing a variety of writing assignments and telling revealing anecdotes about writing instruction.

**Medium**—Students, teachers, and administrators described the writing program in generally similar terms. There were inconsistencies, but for the most part they did not involve key indicators or add up to a grossly inconsistent story. If administrators have a different perception of the writing program, but teachers and students have consistent perceptions, the school is probably in the medium range on this indicator.

**Low**—Descriptions of the writing program by students and teachers are so different they might have been talking about different schools. Administrators may tell the same basic story as the teachers, or they may have a different perception of what is going on than the teachers.

**APPENDIX F:**

**"Rating Form"**



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# SCHOOL STUDY OF WRITING INSTRUCTION
## Directions for completing rating form

**Before filling out the form, review the school report. Your judgments about some, if not most, of the indicators will come from your assessment of the cumulative information as well as from information about a specific indicator. To make judgments, you need to look at the range expressed, particularly at the degree to which students and teachers agreed in their understanding of the writing program. Widely disparate responses between role groups (administrators and teachers, teachers and students) alert you to areas that need closer scrutiny.**

**The response requires marking a point on a sliding scale with an "x" to indicate the degree to which your school typifies an indicator. Mark any point on the line except the vertical (dividing) lines. It is tempting to mark all categories "average," so avoid the exact center of the line unless you are convinced the school is absolutely average for that indicator. Also, it is very unlikely that the school would warrant the same "mark" for every indicator, so try to make independent ratings for each indicator. Where you have insufficient information to make an assessment, check the line so indicating.**

**The indicators include descriptions of high, medium, and low performance. These descriptions should serve as guides, not as criteria that must be present to justify a particular rating. To illustrate this, we have added some slightly offbeat descriptions of schools visited as this study process was developed.**

REMEMBER: **This analysis is intended only to help you strengthen your school's writing instruction. No one outside the school sees it. Be honest in your assessment.**

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# SCHOOL STUDY OF WRITING INSTRUCTION
# RATING FORM

**Note: Use rating guide for explanation and examples of the indicators.**

**School**_____ **Date:**_____

**1. Administrative support**

**A. District level**

**Insufficient Information** ____ **Low**____/____/____/____/____/____/____**High**

**B. School level**

**Insufficient Information** ____ **Low**____/____/____/____/____/____/____**High**

**2. Availability and use of quality professional development/technical assistance**

**A. For writing leaders**

**Insufficient Information** ____ **Low**____/____/____/____/____/____/____**High**

**B. For portfolio accountable teachers**

**Insufficient Information** ____ **Low**____/____/____/____/____/____/____**High**

**C. For other teachers**

**Insufficient Information** ____ **Low**____/____/____/____/____/____/____**High**

**D. Attention to writing that is appropriate for content areas other than language arts**

**Insufficient Information** ____ **Low**____/____/____/____/____/____/____**High**

**E. Teacher training and participation in portfolio scoring**

**Insufficient Information** ____ **Low**____/____/____/____/____/____/____**High**

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F. Evidence of ongoing mentoring and informal professional development

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

G. Level of strategic collaboration in professional development

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

3. Coordination across grade and subject areas

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

4. School climate/communication

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

5. Evidence of communication with families and family support of the writing program.

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

6. Evidence that the school uses community resources in the writing program

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

7. Focus and intensity of writing instruction programs

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

8. Use of *The Writing Portfolio Teacher's Handbook, 2nd Edition* as a resource by all teachers teaching writing

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

9. Evidence that teachers and students focus on <u>writing</u>

A. Evidence that writing is the focus of the writing program, not just portfolios

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

B. Evidence that teachers require more challenging work from students than they once did because students come better prepared

Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High

**C. Evidence of students' confidence that they can eventually reach proficiency**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**10. Evidence that students routinely use and can describe the steps in the writing process**

**A. Students are familiar with and use the writing process**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**B. Students are aware of criteria for judging portfolios (and ways in which they learned these criteria)**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**C. Use of computer to facilitate writing**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**D. Use of feedback to improve writing (conferencing with teachers, family, or other students**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**11. Teacher writing**

**A. Evidence that teachers write and share their writing with students**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**B. Evidence that teachers introduce students to the many functions of writing in adult life**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**12. Evidence of student choice of topics and formats for particular writing assignments**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**13. Evidence of real-world writing**

**A. Evidence of students having the opportunity to use writing for real-world purposes**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

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**B. Evidence that students are aware of the audiences for which they are writing and that the audiences are important to them**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**14. Evidence of integration of writing instruction into general instruction**

**A. Teachers using reading as a source of ideas and models for writing for a variety of purposes**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**B. Language arts teachers teach mechanics in context of writing rather than separate from writing**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**15. Evidence of consistency of messages students receive about writing from different teachers**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

**16. Consistency among student/teacher/administrator perspectives**

**Insufficient Information ____ Low____/____/____/____/____/____/____High**

## APPENDIX G:

"School Profile" Graph



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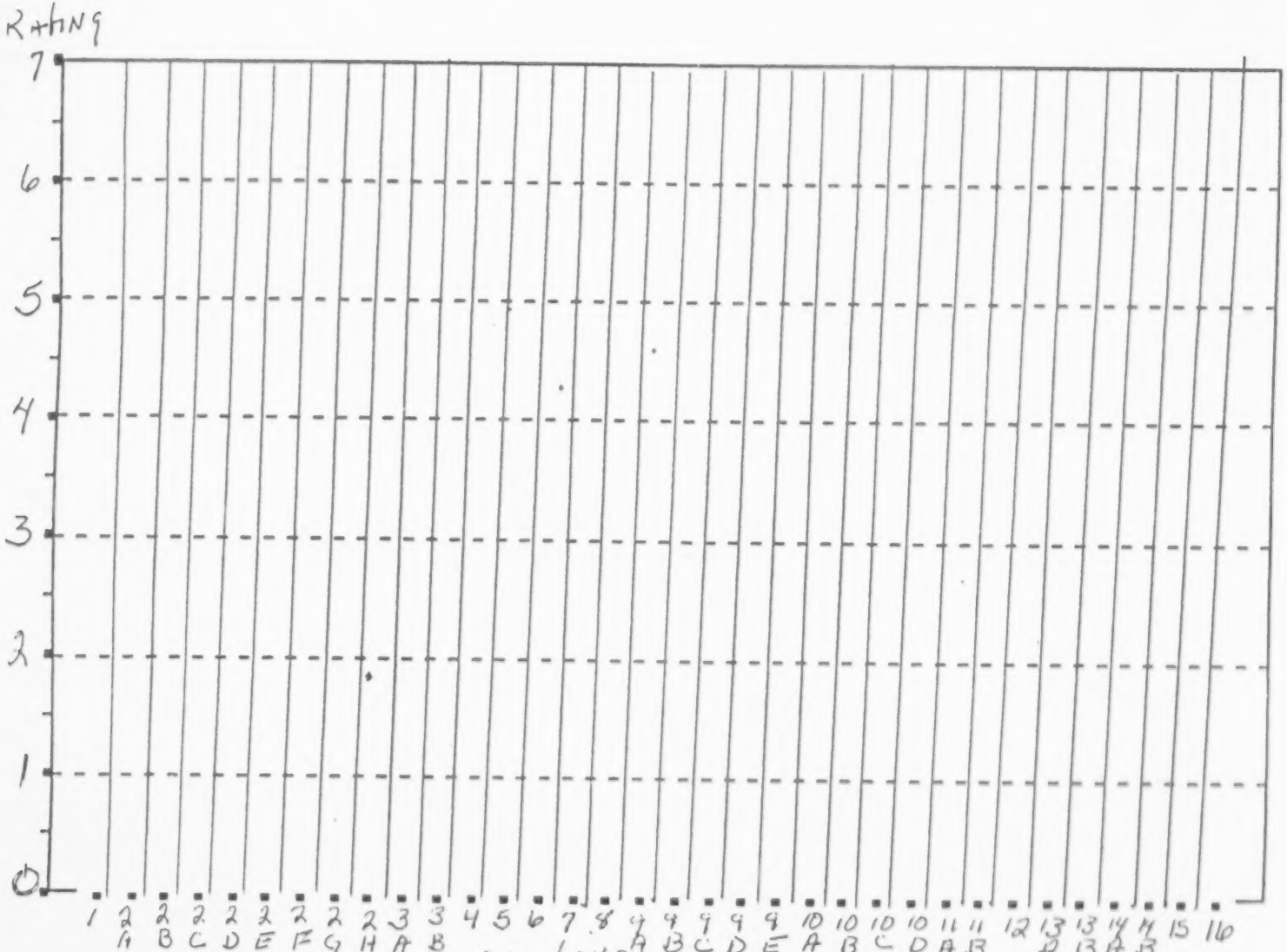
# School Profile





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**APPENDIX H:**

**Revised "Table of Report Sections and Data"**
**(compare to Appendix D)**



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**Key:**
1. D - District administrator interview
2. P - Principal interview
3. T - Teacher composite interview
4. S - Student composite interview

**School Study of Writing Instruction**
**(Revised) Table of report sections and data reference items (p. 1 of 4)**

| Report section | Data reference items |
|---|---|
| 1. Administrative Support - district (report topic 1A) | 1A D: 1, 3-5, 7-13, $11_2$, 14-15<br>P: 4, 6-$8_1$, 9, 12-14, 18, $21_1$<br>T: 4-5, 10, 12-18 |
| Administrative Support - school (report topic 1B) | 1B P: 1-2, 4-$8_2$, 10-11, 13-$22_2$, 23-29<br>T: 4-6, 9-11, 13-27, 32, 42, 46-47 |
| 2. Professional Development (report topics 2A-D) | 2A T: 15-19<br>P: 12-19, $22_1$<br>D: 1, 3-4, 9-13 |
| | 2B same as 2A |
| | 2C same as 2A |
| | 2D T: 15, 18<br>P: 13, 15<br>D: 9 |
| Writing Program Coordination (report topics 3A-B) | 3A D: 7-8<br>P: $8_1$, $8_2$, 9, 11, 23<br>T: 9-12, 14, 23-24<br>S: 20 |
| | 3B D: 7-8<br>P: $8_2$, 9-10, 23<br>T: 6, 9, 11-13, 23-24, 29, 43<br>S: 6-8, 21-22 |
| Focus On/Intensity of Writing (report topic 7) | 7 T: 1-5, 9-10, 13-14<br>S: 4-7, 9-10, 29<br>P: 1-2, $8_1$, $8_2$, 9-11 |

Note: Subscripts distinguish questions which were mistakenly numbered the same on the interview forms.

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**School Study of Writing Instruction**
**(Revised) Table of report sections and data reference items (p. 2 of 4)**

| Report section | Data reference items |
|---|---|
| 3. Scoring<br>(report topics 2E-H) | **2E** P: 15, $22_1$<br>T: 18<br><br>**2F** D: 13<br>P: 20, $21_1$, $21_2$, $22_2$<br>T: 20-22<br><br>**2G** D: 12<br>P: 12-13, 19, 23-25<br>T: 15, 23-26<br><br>**2H** P: 13, 16-17, 23-25<br>T: 15, 19, 23-26 |
| School Climate<br>(report topic 4) | **4** P: 1-3, 7, 17-19, $22_2$, 23-24<br>T: 5-9, 17, 19, 21-25<br>S: 1-2, 4-7, 17, 23-24, 28-31 |
| 4. Instructional Strategies I<br>(report topics 8; 9A-E) | **8** T: 42<br><br>**9A** T: 4, 6-7, 9-11, 13, 29-30, 39, 43<br>S: 6-8, 16-17, 20-21<br>P: 1-2, 5-6, $8_1$, $8_2$, 10<br>D: 8<br><br>**9B** S: 1-2, 4-5, 16-17, 22-24, 30-32<br><br>**9C** T: 10, 14, 44-45<br>S: 3, 13-14, 20-22, 30<br>P: $8_1$, 11<br><br>**9D** T: 2-7, 9, 13-14, 29-30, 33, 39-40<br>S: 1-3, 6-8, 16-17, 20-22, 28-30<br>P: 1-2, 4-8, 10-11, $22_2$<br>D: 1-5, 7<br><br>**9E** T: 8<br>S: 1, 30-31<br>P: 3<br>D: 6 |

Note: Subscripts distinguish questions which were mistakenly numbered the same on the interview forms.

**School Study of Writing Instruction**
**(Revised) Table of report sections and data reference items (p. 3 of 4)**

| Report section | Data reference items |
|---|---|
| 5. Instructional Strategies II<br>(report topics 10A-D; 11A-B) | **10A** T: 28<br>S: 1, 3, 8-12, 15, 22, 25, 29-30<br><br>**10B** T: 44-45<br>S: 13-14<br><br>**10C** T: 31-32<br>S: 9-10<br><br>**10D** T: 34-35<br>S: 11-12, 23-25<br><br>**11A** T: 41<br>S: 18-19<br><br>**11B** T: 37-38, 40, 47<br>S: 16, 18-19, 27<br>P: 29 |
| 6. Instructional Strategies III<br>(report topics 12; 13A-B; 14A-B) | **12** T: 36<br>S: 15-16<br><br>**13A** T: 39<br>S: 16-17<br><br>**13B** T: 39<br>S: 16-17, 22-24<br><br>**14A** T: 37-38<br>S: 16<br><br>**14B** T: 28, 31, 33, 35<br>S: 11-12, 25, 28-30 |

Note: Subscripts distinguish questions which were mistakenly numbered the same on the interview forms.



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**School Study of Writing Instruction**
**(Revised) Table of report sections and data reference items (p. 4 of 4)**

| Report section | Data reference items |
|---|---|
| 7. Family & Community Involvement (report topics 5, 6) | **5** D: $11_2$<br>P: 27-28<br>T: 35, 46<br>S: 23-26<br><br>**6** D: 14<br>P: 29<br>T: 47<br>S: 17, 23-24, 27 |
| 8. Overall view of the value for students of the writing portfolio program in its current form (report topics 15, 16) | **15** T: 1-10, 13-14, 28-30, 34-36, 39-41, 43-45<br>S: 1-2, 6-8, 11-19, 28-31<br><br>**16** D: [refer to other report topics]<br>P: [refer to other report topics]<br>T: [refer to other report topics]<br>S: [refer to other report topics] |

Note: Subscripts distinguish questions which were mistakenly numbered the same on the interview forms.

## APPENDIX I:

Completed *Program Evaluation Standards* Citation Form



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## Citation Form

*The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994, Sage) guided the development of this (check one):

____ request for evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation plan/design/proposal
____ evaluation contract
✓ evaluation report (pilot test report)
____ other: _____

To interpret the information provided on this form, the reader needs to refer to the full text of the standards as they appear in Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, *The Program Evaluation Standards* (1994), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage.

The *Standards* were consulted and used as indicated in the table below (check as appropriate):

| Descriptor | | The Standard was deemed applicable and to the extent feasible was taken into account. | The Standard was deemed applicable but could not be taken into account. | The Standard was not deemed applicable. | Exception was taken to the Standard. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| U1 | Stakeholder Identification | ✓ | | | |
| U2 | Evaluator Credibility | ✓ | | | |
| U3 | Information Scope and Selection | ✓ | | | |
| U4 | Values Identification | ✓ | | | |
| U5 | Report Clarity | ✓ | | | |
| U6 | Report Timeliness and Dissemination | ✓ | | | |
| U7 | Evaluation Impact | ✓ | | | |
| F1 | Practical Procedures | ✓ | | | |
| F2 | Political Viability | ✓ | | | |
| F3 | Cost Effectiveness | | | ✓ | |
| P1 | Service Orientation | ✓ | | | |
| P2 | Formal Agreements | ✓ | | | |
| P3 | Rights of Human Subjects | ✓ | | | |
| P4 | Human Interactions | ✓ | | | |
| P5 | Complete and Fair Assessment | ✓ | | | |
| P6 | Disclosure of Findings | ✓ | | | |
| P7 | Conflict of Interest | ✓ | | | |
| P8 | Fiscal Responsibility | ✓ | | | |
| A1 | Program Documentation | ✓ | | | |
| A2 | Context Analysis | ✓ | | | |
| A3 | Described Purposes and Procedures | ✓ | | | |
| A4 | Defensible Information Sources | ✓ | | | |
| A5 | Valid Information | ✓ | | | |
| A6 | Reliable Information | ✓ | | | |
| A7 | Systematic Information | ✓ | | | |
| A8 | Analysis of Quantitative Information | | | ✓ | |
| A9 | Analysis of Qualitative Information | ✓ | | | |
| A10 | Justified Conclusions | ✓ | | | |
| A11 | Impartial Reporting | ✓ | | | |
| A12 | Metaevaluation | ✓ | | | |

Name Paige Parrish (typed) Date: May 17, 1999

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